

‘It is the time to ramp up so we can keep the pandemic at bay’

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Spirit Mountain Casino had considered reinstituting its popular shuttle service, but ultimately decided to wait given the recent uptick of coronavirus cases in Oregon and the difficulty in thoroughly sanitizing the buses.

“We have to be responsible and consider that most of the people we are bringing in on those buses are older adults,” he said. “We have no plans to do that until we know people will be safe.”

The casino also instituted a mandatory mask policy before the Fourth of July weekend, which Dillon said was received with mostly cooperative customers although some criticized the requirement.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown mandated mask-wearing in all indoor public spaces in the state starting on July 1 to help stem the spread of the virus.

The Facebook Live events continue to be popular, with approximately 150 people joining the online conversation featuring Dillon, Health Services Executive Director Kelly Rowe, Tribal Council member Lisa Leno, General Manager David Fullerton and Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez. Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier led the meeting.

“We are going all-in on masks now,” Mercier said. “Everyone is wearing one in the Governance Center and we made a decision to make everyone in the casino wear a mask as well. We don’t want to let our guard down now.”

Rowe announced that the clinic would be expanding coronavirus testing to Tribal employees and would send out instructions via e-mail. Antibody testing also will be instituted.

“We will start with employees in high-risk areas with lots of contact with others,” she said, such as patients, the public or vendors. “We

plan on having those run through our lab and the employee health plan will cover the tests at no cost to our employees.”

Beginning Monday, July 20, testing will be expanded to patients of the clinic. More information will be provided via Facebook and the Tribal COVID-19 webpage at www.grandronde.org. People are asked not to call the clinic to make an appointment until at least Thursday, July 16, to avoid clogging the phone lines.

“We feel this testing will help us get more information and focus services on those areas that may be lacking,” Rowe said.

As of July 13, the clinic had conducted 235 tests and all have come back negative. Employee testing will be done for clinic employees first, then the Executive Team, Emergency Operations Center incident command personnel and Tribal Council members.

Fullerton reminded everyone that although the Tribal campus is in phase two of re-opening, it is not the time to relax guidelines. He reminded Tribal members to wear a mask, social distance and wash their hands.

“It is the time to ramp up so we can keep the pandemic at bay,” he said. “The likelihood of it happening here is high. When it happens, we will be here to support people. Hopefully, a majority of our employees will receive both (coronavirus) testing and (antibody) testing.”

Fullerton added that plans to open the Tribal preschool, initially targeted for July, will be delayed until at least August due to the rise in coronavirus cases statewide. Public events are also discouraged.

Mercier closed the meeting by asking everyone to continue to stay safe. “Please wear a mask,” he said. “It makes a big difference in the spread of the virus. It may be uncomfortable and inconvenient, but it helps others.” ■

A temperature check area is set up at all entrances

MASKS continued from front page

egon and Washington that are now requiring customers wear a mask while at indoor public spaces such as grocery stores, gyms and retail shops. Oregon’s mask mandate went into effect on Wednesday, July 1, while Washington began requiring masks on June 26.

Spirit Mountain Marketing Director Shawna Ridgebear said that there was a good deal of feedback on wearing masks, both pro and con, but most customers are fairly accommodating to the new rule.

“Spirit Mountain Casino enacted mandatory masks after evaluating the current status of the pandemic’s rising trend in the state and Pacific Northwest, as well as the individual numbers of the counties which the highest numbers of our guests come from,” she said. “We felt it necessary to enact to protect our team members and guests as well as the Grand Ronde community.”

Chinook Winds Casino Resort in Lincoln City, approximately 26 miles from Spirit Mountain Casino, also is requiring its guests wear a mask.

Spirit Mountain Casino was shuttered for an unprecedented 2.5 months beginning in mid-March amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The casino re-opened on Monday, June 1, with several new safety precautions in place, but guests were not required to wear a mask.

As visitors enter the casino, there are visual reminders everywhere to social distance. Guests are to walk on each side of the casino hallways and foyers, and not loiter in the middle. A temperature check area is set up at all entrances, along with complementary masks and hand sanitizing stations. All employees are also required to wear masks.

Employees stand at all entrances to inform guests of the additional safety measures, such as the age restriction of not allowing anyone under the age of 21 in the casino or Spirit Mountain Lodge properties.

The Cedar Plank Buffet has been revamped as well, with disposable menus and tables moved six feet apart. Instead of patrons making their way through an often-crowded line and handling utensils others have touched, they are served a choice of different three-course meal options.

In addition, casino hours are limited to 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. Sunday through Thursday and 6 a.m. to 4 a.m. Friday and Saturday to allow for additional deep cleaning. ■



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