

SECTOR *from page 1A*

The designation by the WHO has propelled the COVID-19 crisis to a level of international prominence, and to the attention of most Americans, in a way that is unfamiliar to most.

City of Florence Public Information Officer Megan Messmer, responding to a *Siuslaw News* request for a situational update, provided the following statement.

“The COVID-19 virus is being tracked by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) nationally and the Oregon Health Authority locally. Lane County Public Health is our lead in the County on this virus. In Florence, we coordinate on a regular basis as a region through the West Lane Emergency Operations Group (WLEOG) to prepare for a coordinated emergency response,” she said. “We do have an Emergency Operations Plan for WLEOG that addresses all hazards, including public health hazards. We are currently in the stage of monitoring the situation per that plan.”

Messmer added, “Our public safety partners have started to meet to coordinate with Lane County Public Health via teleconference weekly for situational updates, as well as our Public Information Network. As far as canceled events, again we are taking guidance from the lead agencies managing this.”

The changing nature of the public’s understanding of COVID-19 is also negatively impacting many businesses

in Florence.

Particularly hard hit are restaurants and tourist-oriented businesses that depend on those traveling by to stop and have a meal or spend the night.

There is also the upcoming spring break at the University of Oregon, which generally brings many students to the area, specifically to enjoy the many different types of food and the unique settings and locations that Florence offers, which is now in jeopardy. There are also a number of private functions like weddings and anniversary celebrations that have been impacted by the virus and those cancellations add to the cumulative effect of the economic slowdown.

These potential customers are the intended audience for a hastily arranged effort by a new group made up of Florence-based restaurant owners, who want to make sure that their visitors and residents are as safe and have as enjoyable a dining experience as possible when visiting.

Florence Restaurants Alliance is the name of the new group and many of the members met on Bay Street on Friday to discuss the COVID-19 issue and to plan a coordinated response to assure their customers are safe and enjoy their time in Florence.

In a statement provided by the group, local restaurateurs want the community to know they take the issue of contamination seriously and are actively engaged in implementing the current best practices as outlined by state and federal agencies.

“Florence Restaurant Alliance was created this week to commit to public safety. With the threat of virus, public concerns are at the top of our priority list. The restaurants on this list (43 in total) have committed to keeping the public safe during this unpredictable time,” the statement said. “As always, the main focus is to keep things clean and sanitary.”

The businesses include Bay St. Grille, Beachcomber, Big Dog Donuts, BJ’s Ice Cream, Bridgeport Market, Bridgewater, Brown Hen, Clawson’s Wheelhouse, Darlings Marina & RV Resort, Driftwood Shores, Dunes Café, The Firehouse, Fresh Harvest, Homegrown Public House and Brewery, Hukilau, Ichiban, ICM Seafood Market, Ixtapa, Jerry’s Place, Kathleen & Nina’s, Los Amigos, Los Compadres, Lovejoy’s Restaurant and Tearoom, Mari’s Kitchen, McDonald’s, Mo’s, Nosh, Off Bay Street Bistro, Old Town Coffee, Eatwell Organic Noodle, Papa Murphy’s, Bay View Bistro at Best Western Pier Point Inn, Pizza Hut, La Pomodori, 1285 Restobar, River Roasters, Rosa’s Mexican, Florence Golf Links, Taco Bell, Traveler’s Cove, Venny’s Café and Waterfront Depot.

“We want the public to know that we care,” the alliance stated. “We are dependent on our local community to keep our small businesses thriving as we come into our busy season. ... Many local establishments are offering take out, curbside delivery service and gift certificate sales. Many of the Florence Restaurant Alliance mem-

bers use Florence Food Delivery (541-991-8399), which is working with our group to help get food out to local residents.”

When Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bettina Hanigan announced the closure of the Florence Visitor’s Center, 290 Highway 101, she also wrote a request.

“If you’re healthy, and not a member of at-risk groups, please continue to shop, dine and recreate at our chamber members’ businesses. If you are in one of the high-risk populations you can still support your local businesses by asking friends or family to pick up your shopping orders, by ordering take-out from your favorite restaurants or by buying gift certificates or gift cards for future use,” she said.

There are also more strictly customer service-oriented entities, such as banks and utility companies, that have instituted upgraded health and safety guidelines in response to the pandemic.

Oregon Pacific Bank President and CEO Ron Green provided a statement regarding the COVID-19 situation and the actions the financial institution has taken to address the pandemic.

“At Oregon Pacific Bank, our primary concern is the health and wellbeing of our staff, clients and the communities we serve. We are monitoring the developments of the coronavirus, COVID-19, and are taking action to minimize community spread of the virus,” Green wrote. “In addition to encouraging our

employees and clients to follow best practices, we have taken internal measures to limit the spread of any exposure, including regular disinfectant of frequently used areas. We have also modified our sick pay policy so that, should the need arise, infected employees can stay home without fearing for their job.”

Green went on to suggest that customers concerned with “social distancing” should utilize digital banking options and mobile apps to do their banking. There are also ATMs and drive thru windows at most bank locations which provide non-contact banking options to customers.

Lane County now has a call center to answer community questions regarding the coronavirus. The call center, which can be reached by calling 541-682-1380, is part of the Joint Information Center established on March 9 by Lane County Health & Human Services to get the most accurate information out to community members.

While Lane County still does not have any positive cases of COVID-19 at this time, the call center will provide community members a way to access up-to-date information.

The call center will be staffed by Lane County Health and Human Services employees and will be available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for non-emergency inquiries related to COVID-19. Community members experiencing an emergency medical event are asked to call 9-1-1.

- Employment options
- Housing
- Transportation
- Military Records
- Filing for disability claims (both service-connected and non service-connected)

- Obtaining military records

- Applying for VA Health Care, Education Benefits and Surviving Spouse Benefits

Due to concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, Lane County Veteran Services is now offering phone-in services through 541-682-4191. The county suggests instead of coming to a walk-in session, veterans may call instead. Veterans will be put on a sign-in sheet just like they at a physical meeting, and then receive a call when their turn comes.

For more comprehensive information on veterans’ issues, contact Lane County Veterans Services at www.lanecounty.org/cms/one.aspx?pageId=4133203 or email veterans@co.lane.or.us.

VETERANS *from page 1A*

Wallace Morey, with Florence Disabled Veterans Services, said he is glad for the increased time that the VSO will spend here.

“This is a something we really needed. The VSOs are important in making sure the vets in this area get the attention they deserve. And having them here on Thursday will really help a lot of our local vets,” Morey said.

The veteran population in Florence remains high; however, as individuals of the Vietnam conflict age, they require more services to

maintain their health and independent lifestyles.

This is also one of the reasons the additional day was scheduled for a VSO to come to Florence, an acknowledgment by Lane County that this area has an increasing need for this important service.

In addition, there are often obstacles presented to veterans that are more easily dealt with by someone familiar with the Veteran’s Administration rules and regulations in place at the county, state and federal levels.

More than 30,000 veterans call Lane County home. Lane

County Veterans Services is charged with meeting with those who need assistance and either providing direct help or pointing them in a direction where they can receive help.

Another local organization, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), also has a VSO available at their location at 1715 21st St. on the last Friday of every month.

The Florence DAV Chapter has also taken on the responsibility of transporting veterans who need medical care to hospitals in other areas which offer medical options unavailable in Florence. Once a

week buses, leave Florence to go to Portland or to Eugene carrying veterans who need medical attention.

VSOs also answer questions and advise veterans and their families on what benefits are available from federal, state county and local resource. The VSO can assist veterans in filing the necessary paperwork for claims and may even represent those individuals in a hearing related to the action. VSO assistance to veterans and their families can be:

- Answering questions, advising and educating individuals and groups on what benefits are available from federal, state, county and local resources
- Assisting eligible persons in filing the necessary claims
- Representing individuals and presenting claims in VA hearings
- Compensation and pension benefits
- Health care information
- Education and training

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