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What's happening in the Siuslaw region

INSIDE — A6

Federal tax payment deadline extended to July 15

Friday morning, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin announced that taxpayers will have an additional three months to file their taxes amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are moving Tax Day from April 15 to July 15," Mnuchin stated in a tweet. "All taxpayers and businesses will have this additional time to file and make payments without interest or penalties."

However, according to the IRS website, filing for taxes is still April 15, with the payment deadline extended to July 15.

"Income tax payment deadlines for individual returns, with a due date of April 15, 2020, are being automatically extended until July 15, 2020, for up to \$1 million of their 2019 tax due. This payment relief applies to all individual returns, including self-employed individuals and

See TAXES page 5A



On March 18, the Confederated Tribes of Coos Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians directed casino management to temporarily suspend all operations at Three Rivers Casino Resort in Florence and Coos Bay.

Mayor Joe Henry writes letter; casino closes doors

BY MARK BRENNAN
SIUSLAW NEWS

On Thursday, March 19, Florence Mayor Joe Henry released an open letter to the

community updating residents on the urgency of the danger posed by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 virus and the actions being taken by the city to combat the pandemic.

"I know the past few weeks, especially the past few days, have been filled with uncertainty, fear and heartache," Henry stated. "Many of us have never experienced something like this in our lifetimes. Working together, I think we can come

through this stronger as a community, but we know it will be difficult before it gets better."

Henry described the situation as a fight against the coronavirus, which is entering "a stark new phase" that has prompted federal and state government to take extraordinary actions an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19.

See LETTER page 5A

Area businesses join Siuslaw School District in feeding the community

Restaurants donate food to schools, area food shares

BY JARED ANDERSON
SIUSLAW NEWS

As restaurants close or limit service in the Siuslaw region, partnerships are being formed between the Siuslaw School District, local food shares and shuttered restaurants to ensure the community stays fed during shutdowns caused by the spread of the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19.

"1285 Restobar made a large

donation of food supplies to help the district feed students and the community during our distribution runs," said Siuslaw School District Superintendent Andrew Grzeskowiak. "The word is getting out and other restaurants are looking to see what they can donate."

The donation comes after Oregon Gov. Kate Brown ordered all restaurants to close dine-in services, allowing only takeout and delivery.

Restobar decided that it would be better for them to close this week, which left behind hundreds of pounds of food that was in danger of going to waste.

"We had all this extra produce

that we didn't want to go to waste," said Restobar co-owner Kurt Hargens. "We heard about the school district and how they're trying to feed all the kids for breakfast and lunch, so we thought that donating the food to the school would be ideal."

Hargens also made sure that his laid-off employees received portions of food as well.

As far as closing the restaurant, Hargens said, "It's hard to get your head wrapped around it. We don't know if this is for four weeks or eight weeks. I'm sick to my stomach for my employees, more than anything. It's tough. They live paycheck to paycheck. So we're trying to do

everything we can for them, getting them set up with unemployment insurance."

As far as collecting insurance for 1285 Restobar, it's unclear whether or not Hargens will receive payments. As reported in *The Oregonian* on March 18, many insurance carriers exclude pandemics and viral infections from coverage.

"We're trying to talk to our insurance company about covering the closing, but they're not even sure if it's possible," Hargens said. "We're just treading water right now."

Siuslaw School District was thankful for the restaurant's donation.

See FOOD page 6A

'WE ARE NOT PREPARED'

Region's leaders meet Friday to coordinate efforts against COVID-19

Update: After the meeting on Friday, three hours after this article was released online at *TheSiuslawNews.com*, Schick contacted the Siuslaw News and stated that planning was going in the right direction. City of Florence Public Information Officer Megan Messmer will be the official spokesperson regarding WLEOG's response to COVID-19.

"We are not prepared" for a novel coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak, Western Lane Ambulance District (WLAD) and Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue (SVFR) Chief Michael Schick said on Thursday.

"I think we've been waiting for something to happen, and then start preparations. I think we are slowly getting things geared up, but

right now if there was to be a massive outbreak in Florence, I'm not sure how we would handle it. We're starting the meetings, but it takes time to get these rolling. I think in general, no — I don't feel that we're prepared at all."

The information comes after the Siuslaw News began receiving reports that local governmental agencies have lacked organization and leadership since COVID-19 was first diagnosed in Oregon. While some agencies, such as Siuslaw School District, have taken strong steps to instituting plans to protect the community and provide services, there still remain more questions than actual actions taken.

The consequences of not being prepared could be severe, with Schick estimating a fatality rate between 2 and 6 percent in the coming weeks if actions aren't taken

immediately. With an estimated 18,000 people in the Siuslaw region, that could be anywhere between a couple hundred people to more than 1,000.

However, Schick also stressed that people should not panic; community members within the region are ready and willing to help in a concerted effort against COVID-19.

"I don't think it's too late, but we're running out of time very quickly," he said, adding that community leaders have been "asking the right questions, the 'What if's' over the last few weeks.

From the view of SVFR and WLAD, these questions include: "What do we do if half of our ambulance employees are infected? Even if we can utilize firefighters and city personnel to drive ambulances, where do we take them if

the hospital overwhelmed? Do we start setting up triage centers at the schools?"

There are other unanswered questions, such as meeting the needs of citizens who are being asked to stay at home.

"Do we need a call-in center for people?" Schick asked. "We just don't have the answers yet. We have a lot of people that want to help, so I think over the next few weeks that's going to start ramping up here for this area — and then the surrounding areas as well."

Two weeks ago, Schick organized a weekly meeting between local governmental agencies, including the City of Florence, PeaceHealth Peace Harbor and the Siuslaw and Mapleton school districts. Before that meeting, "We'd all been planning on our own," Schick said.

See PREP page 7A

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FLORENCE, OREGON

WEATHER



Sunny with a high of 55 and a low tonight of 37.

Full forecast on A3

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