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INSIDE — A3

States, Oregon counties consider reopening strategies

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD FOR THE SIUSLAW NEWS

Now passing three months since Oregon's first reported case of COVID-19, state and county governments are strategizing a cautious reopening of public and business life.

Balancing the trade-off of risks to public and economic health has proven a point of contention for many and has prompted certain county governments to begin pushing for easing the restrictions handed down since Gov. Kate Brown's March 23 executive order.

On April 22, the Douglas County Board of Commissioners authored a letter imploring Brown to consent to the first phase of reopening in Douglas, Coos, Curry, Jackson and Josephine counties effective April 25 under federal guidelines. The letter, with all five county commissioners' signatures, was set to be sent to Brown on April 24, though the governor's office has not responded to the letter as of press time.

While the commissioners stated that they "understand the concern of an increase in COVID-19 cases once restrictions are eased," the letter makes the case for all five counties meeting the state's proposed criteria for reopening.

State Criteria

Brown has expressed favor for a regional approach in reopening the economy depending on certain criteria being met.

See REOPEN page 6A



Peace Harbor's COVID-19 incident command

STORY & PHOTO BY JARED ANDERSON SIUSLAW NEWS

PeaceHealth Peace Harbor staff prepare for the day in the COVID-19 resource war-room.

Medical center increases telehealth options, pandemic protocols

"Telehealth isn't necessarily new, but this is new to us," said PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Nurse Practitioner Heather Posegate. "The virus kind of jumpstarted us into this technological age and will help us in many different ways."

As the Siuslaw region began preparing for the first wave of COVID-19 infections earlier this year, PeaceHealth Peace Harbor looked at technologies and practices that would help prepare for any possible spikes in infections. Telehealth, which will allow patients to get a variety of medical advice from their home computers, is just one of a multitude of preventive measures put in place to ensure the hospital is protected in any potential surge in COVID-19.

As the state begins the process

of reopening, along with allowing the hospital the ability to begin non-emergency procedures, Peace Harbor representatives spoke on the different aspects of their response, from creating complex patient flows to minimize infection, mapping out specific action plans for possible hotspots in the city, and introducing technology like telehealth. In the process, the medical center's staff believe they made improvements that will create a better experience for patients beyond the concerns of COVID-19.

"The one thing we want to get out is that the hospital is the safe place to come," said William Foster, medical director of the emergency department. "We're screening people, we're masking people. We're still limiting visitors to a large ex-

tent, but that's probably going to relax some. But if you need to be here, whether it's an emergency or whatever, it's a safe place to come."

While telehealth has been used at Peace Harbor for a while, particularly in the field of mental health, this is the first time the hospital has seen a wide adoption of telehealth. Primary care has been working with it for two weeks, while specialty care is rolling out this week.

The process of setting up a telehealth appointment is relatively simple. Once a patient has contacted their provider and set up a time, patients will need to sign up online. For the next couple of months, PeaceHealth is providing free guidance on how to sign up for the service.

See HEALTH page 5A

Local restaurateurs battered but hopeful 'Take out' option is financial lifeline while shortages threaten food supply

STORY & PHOTO BY MARK BRENNAN SIUSLAW NEWS

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way that most Americans approach even the most familiar of activities. One of the cornerstones of human culture, eating, has been severely impacted by the pandemic and has been costly on many levels. The activity around food is central to what drives us individually, as families and as a society. It also generates billions of dollars of revenue each year, adding to the bottom line from small towns to America's largest cities.

Plus, socializing on many levels revolves around the sharing of food. It is a core element of cultures around the globe, in America and certainly in Florence, where the economic component of the pandemic has had a devastating impact.

Florence is known as much for the variety of its dining sector as it is



1285 Restobar co-owner Kurt Hargens and chef Jon Holden invite people to order take out from area restaurants.

for its ocean, lakes and dunes, with hundreds of residents relying on work within the community's many eating establishments.

Ordering meals "to-go" has not been banned by recent statewide executive orders limiting social contact and public gatherings, and the option provides a semblance of normalcy to a growing number of area residents.

See RESTAURANTS page 7A

Contemplating connection with Siuslaw School District, Hyak

\$1.4 million partnership could provide fiber internet to area families

BY JARED ANDERSON SIUSLAW NEWS

The Siuslaw School District is discussing the possibility of bringing fiber internet to its students at a discounted rate for the next five years through a partnership with local internet service provider Hyak. The project was proposed during last Wednesday's school board meeting by Hyak co-owner Robbie Wright, along with School Board Chair Guy Rosinbaum and Superintendent Andrew Grzeskowiak.

The potential deal would include a \$1.4 million investment by the district to Hyak, which would use the funds to install 40,000 feet of gigabit fiber optics in specific areas throughout the Siuslaw School District.

In return, the district would receive a five-year contract where all students in the reduced lunch program would receive free internet access, while the remaining students would receive a 25 percent discount. The deal would also in-

clude a waiver of any maintenance fees, totaling almost \$1 million.

The project, which could be completed by September, could potentially bring fiber internet to hundreds of residents within four key areas, and could jumpstart the region's upgrade to fiber internet.

In addition, the deal could help the district with future social distancing orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The district's schools, which are already feeling the effects of overcrowding, could better institute possible continued social distancing regulations by splitting school between distance education and in-school instruction.

A final component of the deal could also create more equity for students as the district begins to shift more resources online.

But questions remain, including whether or not the Siuslaw School District is financially capable of entering into such an agreement, and whether or not the economic

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WEATHER



Light rain with a high of 58 and a low tonight of 49. Full forecast on A3

COMMUNITY



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