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NOVELLI from page 1A

"The helicopter crew located a second unresponsive person and hoisted them into the aircraft. They were brought to waiting EMS at Florence Municipal Airport," USCG reported. "At approximately 7 a.m., the final person was located. With the assistance of the helicopter rescue swimmer, the unresponsive individual was brought aboard the Station Siuslaw River boat and then brought to awaiting EMS."

In a statement about the incident, Senior Chief Petty Officer Jay Nilles, Officer-in-Charge of Station Siuslaw River, said he was humbled by the citizens of Florence.

"Together with our partner agencies, we strive to prevent the loss of life for those who go to sea. This community is a family that embraces us, as we embrace everyone who crosses the bar for a living or to recreate on the ocean. We are reminded during these times that the ocean is unforgiving and can be a treacherous place to work and recreate. We will continue to support our community and do all we can to keep those safe who go to sea for their livelihood or pleasure."

He stated that the loss of Amber and Kyle, whose names had not been officially released at the time, deeply saddened the community.

"We continue to stand by you in this time of need and healing. We could not continue to be strong and successful without our partnerships with Siuslaw Valley Fire Rescue and Western Lane Ambulance, who both assisted us in safely recovering one survivor from the tragic incident at sea, and getting him to a higher level of medical care at a rapid pace," Nilles said.

For six years, the Novellis had been serving up fresh seafood at their small business located along the public docks of the Port of Siuslaw. Before they got into the industry, Kyle was a



MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

Novelli's Crab & Seafood now shows dozens of flowers, cards and other remembrances as the community honors the lives of Amber and Kyle Novelli, who crabbed and fished in Florence for years.

carpenter by trade, though he always loved to fish.

"I told him 'If you love to fish and you can make money doing this, then let's do it.' He said yes, and so we did it," Amber told *Siuslaw News* in a 2019 interview.

They would go up and down the coast fishing, driving to places like Bend, Ore., to sell their catch. But in 2014, they decided to set their anchor in Florence, opening Novelli's at the Port of Siuslaw.

"I'll never forget the very first day that we opened here in Florence. Mike Bones came down in his outfit from the casino and he had a group with him. They were just so welcoming. The whole town just started coming down and it was all these nice, nice people," Amber recalled in 2019. "It's like having a house on the water where everyone just comes to visit and it's like everyone ends up turning into your personal friend."

"The people here are just the nicest I've ever met."

Both Amber and Kyle had previously spoke of the dangers in navigating the bar.

"The bar here is the worst bar I've ever experienced," Amber said last year, talking about the point where the

river meets the ocean.

A year before she spoke, local retired teacher and fisherman Bruce McKibbin was found unresponsive after his boat capsized near the North Jetty.

"A majority of the boating accidents out here happen at the jetty tip, not out in the ocean. We've been out before where I didn't know if we were going to make it back in," she stated at the time.

But it was their love of family and the business that kept the Novellis going out.

"We work shoulder to shoulder out here. It's a family thing," Amber told *Siuslaw News* last July.

Kyle agreed, saying, "I love crabbing because it's fast-paced and we all work together."

There is an active GoFundMe fundraiser for the Novellis and their family at www.gofundme.com/f/amber-amp-kyle-novellis-fundraiser. As of Tuesday, the amount raised had surpassed the \$20,000 goal.

On the page, Amber's son D.J. Reynolds posted, "Thank you everyone for keeping our family in thoughts and prayers. It just shows us how impactful Kyle and Amber were to our tiny community. We can't express how much it's meant to us."

TRANSPORT from page 1A

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the relatively simple act of driving a small group to medical appointments has required alteration. Service was ultimately halted early this spring while board members determined the safest way to reintroduce the service, if that was even possible, once the guidelines and protocols for transportation of ill individuals had been codified and released to the public by the Oregon Health Authority.

"Because of the virus, we had to cease operations both for the safety of the passengers and our volunteer drivers," Grove said.

Friends of Florence transports, free of charge, cancer patients who may have weakened immune systems or other medical issues that compromise their ability to fight off infections and disease. These underlying conditions make restarting service in the medical support area more critical than opening other businesses that have been shut down, such as restaurants and motels.

The nonprofit will resume service on Monday, July 6, with several necessary changes in practice.

Under the plan, devised by Friends of Florence Operations Chief Bart Mealer, the five-day-a-week bus trips will differ markedly from those in the past.

The changes include limiting the number of riders to four per trip to allow for physical distancing, the taking of temperatures of all riders and prohibiting eating or drinking while in the vehicle.

Friends of Florence will provide hand sanitizer and disposable face masks for all riders, as well as clean

and sanitize the bus at the end of every trip.

However, the transportation is also limiting its trips. Instead of taking patients for radiation treatment to both the Willamette Valley Cancer Institute in Eugene and the Oregon Urology Institute in Springfield, the bus will go only to the Cancer Institute in Eugene, which will coordinate with the Friends of Florence to schedule the riders.

According to Grove, donations to support the Friends of Florence have dwindled during the pandemic.

"Right now, what we are really needing is to increase the donations coming in from the community. Since we stopped operating, donations have tapered off, which is very understandable given the current circumstances," he said. "The Florence community has been very supportive over the years and we are sure that once we start running again, they will step up to help us, as they have for 35 years."

More than 30,000 area

residents have been the recipients of the generosity and dedication of those that have accepted the responsibility of driving, as trips are made five days a week and average 160 miles per day.

The drivers have totaled more than 1.4 million miles transporting others to much needed medical treatments and examinations.

Grove is hoping that as the pandemic wanes in Oregon, and the restrictions regarding physical distancing continue to relax, Friends of Florence will be able to increase the number of individuals it can assist.

"One of the things we really want to do is increase our passenger load. We are starting to get more requests than we have seats for, so as soon as we can, we want to help more people get to their appointments," Grove said.

For more information about riding the bus, volunteering to drive or making donations, contact Grove at 541-997-8629 or Mealer at 541-997-8663, or go to friendsofflorence.net.

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