

BASKETS from page 1A

If people would like to donate, contact Bennett at 541-991-3455. Donations will be accepted through December.

As for the Christmas Food Basket Giveaway, it will operate similar to the past. People will enter Siuslaw Middle School from 27th Street, tell volunteers how many people are in their households — usually between 2 and 8 — and receive a free basket of food with all the fixings for a holiday dinner.

Each Community Christmas Basket contains either a turkey or chicken; stuffing, dinner rolls and canned vegetables; fresh potatoes, carrots, apples and oranges; eggs, butter and milk; applesauce and fruit cocktail; and pantry items such as crackers, peanut butter and jam. Plus, each box also contains cookies and candy canes.

A majority of the items are pre-packaged and will be handled by volunteers wearing masks and gloves. For the items that will be bagged onsite, including the apples and oranges, masked and gloved volunteers will carefully ensure sanitation.

“We have enough space that we can spread out the stacks of foods on the pallets,” Bennett said. “We have the ability to separate those by

six feet.”

Volunteers, also masked and gloved, will fill shopping carts with items from each of the stations, gathering up the boxes, cans and other goods depending on the number of people in a household. Just like in a normal year, the people receiving their baskets won't have to get out of their cars.

Bennett said she is complying with every piece of advice she can to keep the food recipients and volunteers safe.

“This may be the new norm for what we have to do in the future,” she noted. “Who knows? I want it to work, and I don't want anybody to be sick.”

The Christmas Food Basket Giveaway regularly sees nearly 100 volunteers working to organize and staff the event.

“This is a big project, and the Soroptimists have never done it by ourselves,” Bennett said.

Local groups including Kiwanis Club of Florence, Rotary Club of Florence, Florence Elks, Florence Masonic Lodge and Camp Florence have provided volunteers and other support.

“We just coordinate it,” Bennett said. “Somebody from our group contacts stores to order the food, find the location and collect some money. But it has always been the

community.”

The Christmas Food Basket Giveaway was started by a Florence Soroptimist more than 30 years ago, who started keeping food and toy donations in her shop for people in need.

“It started out of the back of a station wagon, and now we can't do it out of the station wagon anymore,” Bennett said.

The baskets continue to be free to the community, with a value of approximately \$60 worth of food inside.

“They get a pretty good box of food,” Bennett said. “Our goal is not just for dinner, but to feed them for the day, at least.”

She said that was why each box has peanut butter — “that's a good protein” — and snacks that kids can put together themselves.

Even the box of cookies included in the basket is special. Donated by Little Dutch Boy Cookie Company from Draper, Utah, the cookies are festive and delicious. All the Soroptimists have to pay is freight.

The Christmas Food Basket Giveaway also requires no paperwork from recipients.

“There are no requirements, and that's a really important thing,” Bennett said. “There's nothing they have to fill out to get this box. All they have to do is come to the school

and say they need a box and tell us how big a family they're trying to feed. ... Because we don't require any qualifications, it doesn't reduce what they can get from food share.”

People eligible for food from Florence Food Share get 12 boxes a year.

“This doesn't count as one of those boxes,” Bennett stated.

That's not to say that the Soroptimists don't work with food share. They get guidance on their numbers from the organization, and donates leftover food at the end of distribution.

In addition, any additional funds raised go right back into the Soroptimist's account for next year's basket giveaway.

“We're very careful about what we spend our money on. It is public money and we have to be careful,” Bennett said.

It is also a public event. People who want to be involved can contact Bennett about volunteering, or just show up on the day of the event around 9 a.m. Masks will be required, but the Soroptimists will be providing gloves and disinfectant wipes. People should also dress for December weather, which is often cold and rainy.

Also new this year, volunteers will need to sign in and provide contact information. Bennett said

this is important if people do get sick so the Soroptimists can trace people's contacts.

It's a reality of 2020.

Bennett also acknowledged that the decision to focus on the food baskets may disappoint people who were looking forward to the toy giveaway.

The Soroptimists are willing to give advice to the groups putting together toy donations.

“I don't want to discourage that, but we can't do it this year. But we can do this,” Bennett said. “And I think this is equally as important. If I have to choose between a kid getting a toy and getting fed, he's going to get fed.”

Soroptimist International of Florence is also working to adapt to 2020. Members meet virtually through Zoom meetings and gather the board of directors. They also are concluding their rose sale on Friday, Oct. 23, where people can buy a dozen roses for \$20. These will be delivered on Nov. 3. People can call Soroptimist Jo Hine at 541-997-2233 to order.

People can mail donations for the Christmas Food Basket Giveaway to Soroptimist International of Florence, PO Box 1209, Florence OR 97439. They can also contact Bennett at 541-991-3455 or dump lady@hotmail.com.

COVID from page 1A

The University of Oregon had reported 270 cases for the first three weeks of October when the governor's office made its announcement.

As of Friday, the university had seen 421 total cases since June 1, illustrating a 63-percent increase of cases at the university since Oct. 1.

Counties are placed on the watch list when there is a “sporadic case” rate of 50 or more per 100,000 in the preceding two weeks and the county has more than 5 sporadic cases in the same timeframe.

Sporadic cases are those which cannot be traced to a source, indicating community spread.

According to data from OHA released Oct. 20, there have been 633 COVID-related fatalities in the state. OHA also reported 346 newly confirmed cases, bringing the state's total to 40,136.

“The watch list signifies

caution,” Brown said. “When we are able to address community spread early on, the more likely we are to be successful in curbing that spread. While OHA offers support and resources to help county officials prevent further case spikes, it remains up to all community members to do their part.”

Florence City Manager Erin Reynolds emphasized the need for continued vigilance at Monday's meeting of the Florence City Council.

“As many of you have heard, we are in a new state of COVID for Lane County. That means we are encouraging everyone to do what you can to be creative and safe and enjoy the upcoming holiday of Halloween,” Reynolds said. “Do what you can outside and enjoy the holiday with your close family and your COVID circle.”

Meanwhile, neighboring Douglas County's COVID-19 Response Team similarly appealed to the

county's residents this week to help curtail the spread in light of recent increased metrics. Though Douglas County has had a relatively low case rate during the pandemic and is still far from being considered for the watch list, there has been a marked increase since mid-September — including in sporadic case counts.

In the response, Douglas County Public Health Officer Dr. Bob Dannenhoffer stated that almost all the county's cases were from different sources and that he anticipates numbers to remain high and possibly increase through the rest of the fall season.

“It appears that Dr. Redfield and Dr. Fauci are likely correct that the vaccine will not be available for wide use until the second or third quarters of 2021,” he said, referring to the directors of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Allergy

and Infectious Diseases, respectively.

The Douglas County response team pointed to an upswing of cases since Labor Day as “worrying” considering the time of year — warning of severe health, educational and economic impacts should cases continue their upward trend.

“This should be very concerning for everyone as we enter into the busiest social and cold/flu season of the year,” said Dannenhoffer. “We not only think we have reached a critical juncture with COVID-19 in Douglas County, we know we have. If we do not take action to stop the spread now, the virus could potentially wreak havoc and residents run the risk of seeing these real-life consequences.”

County health officials remind residents to maintain health practices that can reduce the spread of the virus:

- Make a habit of washing and sanitizing your hands.

That means washing after you eat, touch new surfaces, go to the bathroom, go to the store, go to the post office or after a meeting. Remember also to try to avoid touching your face as much as possible.

- Stay at least six feet apart from anyone that is not from your immediate household. This means paying attention to the distance stickers at the store, the bank, at restaurants and at businesses.

- Stay home from work, school and play if you are sick. This includes not running errands or going shopping or inviting visitors to your home. If you need help, reach out to friends, family or utilize an app or businesses that offers no contact deliveries.

- Minimize travel, especially out of the state, and limit visitors to your home.

Wear a mask where recommended.

In addition, OHA has issued new guidance on the use of masks. It has determined that the use of face shields are not recommended with the exception of when dealing with the hearing impaired. The OHA favors masking instead. Face coverings are now required in all private and public workplaces and are required for outdoor and indoor markets, street fairs, and private and public schools and colleges.

More COVID-related reopening information for the State of Oregon can be found at govstatus.egov.com/reopening-oregon.

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