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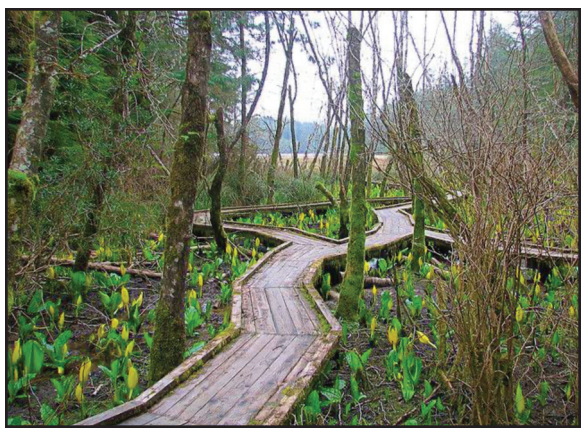
Siuslaw News

THESIUSLAWNEWS.COM SATURDAY EDITION | JANUARY 30, 2021 | $1.00



NATURE HIKES
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Siuslaw News
NEWS & VIEWS THAT DEFINE OUR COMMUNITY
VOL. 131, NO. 9
JANUARY 30, 2021
FLORENCE, OREGON

Chamber continues plans for the 114th Rhododendron Festival

2021 Rhody Days will not include the royal senior or junior courts

The Florence Area Chamber of Commerce is proceeding with plans for its 114th Rhododendron Festival with the theme "Rhody Wonderland." The event is scheduled on its traditional date, the third weekend of May, May 13 to 16.

A contract is in place for the Davis Shows NW Family Carnival and contingencies are being made for the rhododendron show, parades, car cruises and vendor fair.

But the one element that brings the most pomp and ceremony to the annual event is the naming of the Rhododendron Court and crowning of Queen Rhododendra and King of the Coast.

"We are unable to safely conduct our ceremonial duties with the court. It's a sad result of the pandemic," said Chamber President/CEO Bettina Hannigan. "These young people bring so much class and hard work to the event and are such valuable ambassadors for Florence. It's such a shame to lose this joyful tradition this year."

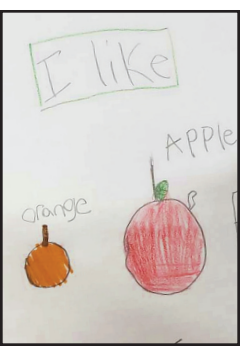
Members of the court traditionally sell commemorative pins to raise awareness of the event as well as funds for scholarships. Their coronation at the Florence Event Center on Wednesday evening of Rhody Week has traditionally been the official start of the festival.

See **RHODY** *page 8A*

WEATHER

Rain throughout the day with a high of 49 and a low of 46.
Full forecast on A3

COMMUNITY



Boys and Girls thank cafeteria staff
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Cinema updates 'Greene' Screen
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Mapleton adapts to reopening metrics

School district plans to expand LIPI, elementary on-site learning

BY CHANTELLE MEYER
SIUSLAW NEWS

Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Health Authority, with guidance from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, are allowing school districts across the state to begin transitioning students back to school after nearly a year of comprehensive distance learning (CDL). Following the successful roll out of limited in-person instruction (LIPI), Mapleton School District is on track to bring more students back to campus.

"It has been kind of a whirlwind just trying to figure things out," said Mapleton Superintendent Jodi O'Mara.

The district has been hard at work since mid-December considering options for a second semester where students will be allowed back on campus, providing all safety measures are followed and county COVID-19 levels do not rise any higher.

O'Mara has met in two planning sessions with staff on the reopening plan. Together, they created a survey for Mapleton families asking for their input.

"We have put out a survey to all of our families to fill out to gather information about whether or not students are going to return to school virtually, or in person when the option is available, as well as about transportation and best ways to communicate," O'Mara said. "We also have a board work session next week for me to present the plan and say, 'Here's what we're thinking for reopening at both levels — at the middle school/high school level and the elementary level."

Based on metrics released through Ready Schools, Safe Learners, Mapleton will be able to phase in elementary on-site learning this February. Middle/high school students will remain in CDL and LIPI until the district is allowed to include more students on campus.

See **MAPLETON** *page 5A*

Dine-in restrictions initiate pushback, disagreement among local restaurateurs

Florence features several restaurants with outdoor dining options, including heated decks, in Historic Old Town and around town. However, some area restaurants have begun allowing indoor dining against current governmental guidelines under the COVID-19 pandemic.

STORY & PHOTO
BY MARK BRENNAN
SIUSLAW NEWS

The long-term effects of the pandemic on local businesses are not yet known, but the short-term impacts have proven challenging — and potentially fatal — for some area businesses due to the current restrictions associated with Lane County's "extreme risk" designation during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular peril are local restaurants, which have taken the brunt of the restrictions imposed by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

The struggle to navigate the path forward during a time of literally unprecedented challenges to the restaurant industry, which has some owners saying they are being forced to make a choice between following the law or openly breaking it in order to survive — in many cases, with the support of sympathetic community members.

There are three tables, with six chairs, outside of the Little Brown Hen Café on Highway 101.

At lunchtime on Thursday (Jan. 28), *Siuslaw News* observed no customers at any of those tables. Inside the restaurant, however, there were five tables with a total of 12 customers sitting, eating and talking amongst themselves.

The kitchen was bustling, there were three to-go orders placed and two orders to go were picked up within a few minutes of each other.

See **DINE** *page 6A*

Port starts creation of strategic plan

BY MARK BRENNAN
SIUSLAW NEWS

The Port of Siuslaw Board of Commissioners met Thursday, Jan. 27, for a work session to begin the process of updating the district's strategic plan. The evening meeting was held virtually with staff from the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) in attendance to share their thoughts on the best way to begin the process of identifying, contacting and conversing with stakeholders involved with the port of Siuslaw, for inclusion in developing the plan.

Jacob Callister and Rachel Dorfman, representing LCOG, presented their initial work product, which laid out the process that would include as many individuals and organizations as possible that are involved with the port.

"We want to get as much of your thoughts as we can tonight as possible," said Callister, who took the lead during the meeting. "We want to get a lot of information from you and one of the best ways to do that is to give you information, something to chew on — and for a project of this size, we will let these conversations become central to our discussion as we move forward."

He then walked the commissioners through the steps LCOG suggested in order to include as many voices in the creation of a broad, community-based plan for the updated strategic plan.

"Some of the stakeholders we have identified here are groups or individuals we might consider including in the main focus groups we hope will contribute to the discussion," Callister said.

He then ran through a PowerPoint presentation which listed groups that would be central to the project, like the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce, the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, the City of Florence Planning Department, Florence City Manager and the Mapleton School District.

Commissioner Craig Zolezzi wanted to ensure the inclusion of the group most critical to the successful operation of the port — area anglers.

"Most of the time when I hear about the port, or I get asked questions, it is usually about the facilities available to the fishermen," Zolezzi said. "And I just want to make sure we include them in any groups that we are working with because, after all, they are our main customers."

See **PORT** *page 8A*

Have Your Say
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TO NOMINATE YOUR FAVORITE FLORENCE BUSINESSES
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