

**SEPTEMBER from page 5A**

Locally, Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts began the 2020-21 school year in CDL. Boys and Girls Club initiated PACE, an all-day program that allowed staff to help children with their distance learning activities in the morning while engaging in traditional club activities in the afternoon.

September also amped up towards the November election, with local races bringing aspects of the national debates to town. Lane County Republicans hosted a Candidate Q&A at the Florence Events Center for local city council candidates, as well as candidates from other Republican races. The event, however, showed differing positions on COVID-19, as many in the crowd did not wear masks or maintain six feet of distance despite attempts by organizers to enforce guideline requirements.

**OCTOBER 2020**

On Oct. 7, Lane County led the state in confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 53 of the 305 new cases in Oregon. The county reported another 90 in the next two days, leading to a total of 1,723 cases in the county. LCPH had to conduct contact tracing for each case, attempting to keep tabs on 617 people who may have been exposed to the virus.

"We can have an outbreak or clusters in one population of people, but unless the entire community is really taking the health recommendations seriously and being vigilant on those, then we will see spread to all corners of our community," Davis said. "Unfortunately, that's what we're starting to see."

By Oct. 7, Oregon had a total of 36,116 cases and 594 deaths from COVID-19.

Brown moved Lane County to the watch list on Oct. 16, saying, "It will take the entire county working together to bring these numbers under control. Once COVID-19 is spreading in the community, small family get-togethers can also lead to dozens of infections."

Local businesses also continued to report the impacts of COVID-19, with small closures for testing and sani-

tation. One of those was Siuslaw Public Library, which resumed operations soon after.

Although autumn was normally filled with seasonal adventures, most large-scale events were reduced or converted to virtual. CROW held a pumpkin carving contest and Coast Radio, True Value and SVFR gave out pumpkins in a drive-by format.

Brown extended the state of emergency over COVID-19, citing the over 200,000 Americans who had died from COVID-19.

**NOVEMBER 2020**

Brown announced new metrics for the return to school through OHA and Oregon Department of Education's "Ready Schools, Safe Learners" guidance.

Oregon continued to show a rise in COVID-19 cases, due in part to the resumption of school for grades k-12, but also the return of collegiate students in Eugene.

On Nov. 18, Brown mandated a statewide "two-week freeze," during which restaurants could serve take-out and delivery only, social get-togethers were limited to six people, faith-based gatherings were limited to 25 indoors and 50 outdoors, and gyms, pools and other large venues were closed.

The governor said, "The dreaded winter surge is here," noting that hospitals were expecting an influx of COVID-19 patients during what could be the "roughest days of the pandemic."

Community groups again adapted to COVID-19 safety measures — this time to raise food and funds with the annual Pounding for Florence Food Share and provide a to-go Thanksgiving Dinner, planned by the Florence Kiwanis Club at the Florence Elks Lodge.

"It's a little different this year," said Kiwanian Shannon Sheets.

In addition, Lane County provided the use of 20 pallet shelters to the Florence Emergency Cold Weather Shelter so it could provide shelter to the unhoused during COVID-19. A partnership with the City of Florence and First Step Florence allowed the shelters to be installed at a temporary site

north of town.

By the end of November, Oregon had 912 deaths, 4,518 hospitalizations and 75,431 cases of COVID-19.

**DECEMBER 2020**

Local businesses continued to feel the impact from the pandemic, exacerbated by the governor's "freeze," which was extended. Lane County's chambers of commerce penned a letter to Brown pleading for relief for small businesses. City Lights Cinemas again adapted, this time offering curbside concessions as well as its streaming service.

On Dec. 18, Oregon reported more than 100,000 cases of COVID-19, bringing the state total to 100,308.

Again, there was hope, as the state received its first doses of vaccine, made by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE, on Dec. 14. A vaccine manufactured by Moderna Inc. arrived on Dec. 22. By the end of the month, the state received 124,705 doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Medical Center administered its first COVID-19 vaccinations on Dec. 24.

Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts began limited in-person instruction (LIPI), bringing small amounts of students back to campus for the first time since the previous March.

"It's very structured," said Mapleton Superintendent Jodi O'Mara. "There's a lot of expectations, lots of guidelines, and lots of protocols in place to keep everyone safe. It took a lot of planning and training and a lot of conversations, but we were able to make it happen — and we are so grateful we are."

OSAA revised the school sports calendar, moving the start of activities to late February.

December remained a time for winter cheer, which people helped foster with the Soroptimist International of Florence's Christmas Food Basket Giveaway, Florence Elks' to-go Christmas Dinner, small fundraisers and toy giveaways. New Year's Eve traditions were similarly quiet.

"I know the mere thought of 2020 coming to an end

brings a smile to many of our faces. It surely has been a year for the books," Brown said. "Even in our most difficult moments, I continue to be endlessly impressed with how Oregonians come together and lift one another up during tough times."

**JANUARY 2021**

On Jan. 1, Lane County and 23 other counties remained in "extreme risk" of community spread of COVID-19. In Florence, cases of COVID-19 surpassed 80 as small clusters were reported from social gatherings.

"Every week, more Oregonians are being vaccinated against this deadly disease. But, until vaccines are widely available with high participation rates, the surest way to open our communities is to continue practicing the measures we know are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19 — wear your mask, keep physical distance from others, avoid gatherings, wash your hands often, and stay home when you are sick," Brown said.

Florence reported its first two deaths from COVID-19, with 36 new cases reported in just two weeks.

Despite the rising local numbers, the Little Brown Hen and The Firehouse restaurants chose to reopen for indoor dining.

"If businesses reopen too early and, instead, create new spikes in COVID-19 cases, the actions of a few business owners could set entire communities back and keep them in the 'extreme risk' category for even longer," said Brown.

LCPH hosted a Vaccine Town Hall to emphasize that "vaccines belong in arms, not freezers" and that the state is working to inoculate people as vaccine supply becomes available.

Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts continued to bring students in for LIPI while revising plans under new "Ready Schools, Safe Learners" guidance that said hybrid options could begin in February.

City Lights Cinemas' GoFundMe campaign was fully funded, keeping the lights shining despite the ravages of the pandemic on the movie theater's business model.

Additional businesses briefly closed and reopened due to cases of COVID-19, with no large clusters reported, and vaccinations continue their slow roll out.

**FEBRUARY 2021**

On Feb. 4, Lane County announced the opening of COVID-19 vaccination pre-registration. So many people logged in to sign up that Lane County's website went down for several days.

OSAA sanctioned the beginning of the football season, so the Siuslaw Vikings played a 7-on-7 match-up against Sweet Home at Hans Petersen Field on Feb. 5. Volleyball received approval once counties could enter the "high risk" or lower designation — which Lane County did on Feb. 26.

Under "high risk," people were still asked to wear a mask, limit gatherings to small groups, keep at least six feet distance between people, wash their hands, stay home when sick and consider getting a flu vaccine. However, restrictions lifted on restaurants, allowing limited in-person dining, and other businesses.

Brown also extended the state of emergency for COVID-19 while acknowledging the work counties were doing to improve case rates.

On Feb. 10, Mapleton Elementary opened for hybrid learning, with Siuslaw Elementary following on Feb. 22. Upper grades began to be phased in, with plans to bring them in by the end of March and spring break. In addition, both school districts were able to fully vaccinate their staffs.

Locally, Florence Area Chamber of Commerce decided to "postpone" the 114th Rhododendron Festival.

In addition, OSHA fined the Little Brown Hen and The Firehouse restaurants for "willful violations" for allowing in-person dining and potentially exposing employees to COVID-19. The fines totaled \$35,950, but the businesses have the right to appeal.

By the end of February, Oregon had 155,787 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,212 deaths. This joined

the more than 500,000 total American deaths due to COVID reported on Feb. 22.

"Every life lost to COVID-19 is a tragedy," Brown said. "With more than 500,000 Americans who have died from this virus, there are infinitely more people who are now without a friend, family member or other loved one. ... I hope that, as we remember all those we have lost, we collectively continue to help protect each other from this disease."

**ONE YEAR IN**

COVID-19 has been in Oregon for more than a year now.

"Oregon was one of the first states in the nation to report a case of COVID-19, but a year later our state has the fourth lowest coronavirus case rate in the nation, the fourth lowest death rate and the fourth lowest COVID-19 death rate among seniors. If Oregon's death rate matched the nation's, three times as many Oregonians would have lost their lives," stated OHA Director Patrick Allen. "You made the difference."

Citing the many safety measures enacted by governments, organizations, businesses and individuals, Allen emphasized, "we depend on each other to save lives."

He reported that 973,022 first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Oregon.

Brown also announced a new vaccine prioritization schedule, which she hopes will see all Oregonians 16 and older eligible for the vaccine by July 1.

"Come summer, provided supplies from the federal government continue as planned, any Oregonian who wants the vaccine will be eligible to receive it," Brown said. "While that gives us all a reason to breathe a sigh of relief, it should also serve as a reminder that the finish line is in sight — and we cannot let up."

For more information on COVID-19 in Oregon, visit [govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19](http://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19) or [covid.vaccine.oregon.gov](http://covid.vaccine.oregon.gov).

For additional local coverage of the pandemic, visit [TheSiuslawNews.com](http://TheSiuslawNews.com).

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