

Cottage Grove Sentinel

Est. 1889

VOL. 132, NO. 8 • Your Local News Delivered Your Way: In Print. Online. On the Go!



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Lane County enters 'High Risk' designation Friday

Restaurants may offer indoor dining, museums may open under new category

BY CHANTELE MEYER
FOR THE SENTINEL

Based on COVID-19 improved case counts, Lane County will be downgraded from “extreme risk” to “high risk” effective Friday, Feb. 26.

“Oregonians continue to make smart choices and the numbers speak for themselves,” said Oregon Gov. Kate Brown. “As of (Feb. 18), Oregon had the third lowest infection rate in the nation. And while

“While this is great news, we must remain vigilant with the new variants.”

— Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

this is great news, we must remain vigilant in the face of challenges ahead with the new variants. We advise Oregonians to continue to follow safety measures and choose your activities wisely so that you are minimizing risk as best you

can.” Statewide, as of Feb. 13, Oregon had a COVID-19 case rate of 181.3 cases per 100,000. This is a trend downward from 225.3 the two-week cycle before. Similarly, Lane County had a case rate of 222 as of

Jan. 30 but dropped to 194.5 cases per 100,000 last week.

While that number still shows “substantial spread” of the virus in the community, this means that Lane County will exit the “extreme risk” category it has been in since the governor announced new metrics in November.

Under “high risk,” people are still asked to wear a mask, limit gatherings to small groups, keep at

See **LANE 8A**

City Council mobilizes assistance package

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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The Cottage Grove City Council approved an assistance package on Monday night designed to mitigate the ongoing financial hardships faced by local businesses and residents.

Following discussions with local businesses over the past two weeks, City Manager Richard Meyers presented to the council a package of assistance for residents and businesses burdened by the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

The package includes assistance methods both substantial and modest.

At the top of the list is a shifting of funds which were established last July in the city’s Small Business Emergency Loan Program, managed by the third party Community LendingWorks out of Eugene.

The city set aside \$100,000 for the program last year, a quarter of which was to be used as a \$25,414 match from Business Oregon in grants and a remaining \$74,500 to be loaned out.

Fortuitously, more money than expected became available and the match ballooned from the initial one-to-one ratio to a final total of about \$85,000.

That grant money went out to help 11 local businesses, however the remaining loan funds found a rather lukewarm demand; only four \$10,000 loans have been issued since the program began. Meyers reported that, as a result, a little more than \$30,000 still remains.

See **COUNCIL 11A**



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Lynn Boe, who runs local nonprofit Tucker's Cupboard, volunteers at ROP on Feb. 18 to distribute food to the community.

Rural Organizing Project takes on food pantry status

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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As communities continue to feel the burden of the pandemic’s economic devastation, food security has risen to be a more prominent issue in many households.

In response to that demand, the Rural Organizing Project (ROP) in Cottage Grove has established another pillar of support in the community by acquiring status as an official food pantry.

“A lot of what we’ve been doing is convening people around emergency access to food during the pandemic,” said Executive Director of Rural Organizing Project Jessica Campbell.

ROP is a statewide grassroots organization which focuses on multiple rural issues through autonomous work in communities, often addressing topics related to equality and justice.

Shortly after its current space

on Main Street was donated to the group two years ago, the building began serving as a hub for victims of the 2019 snowstorm to rest, fill up on basic provisions and connect with others.

As ROP continued to serve in partnership with other organizations in the community, Campbell said the group’s importance of addressing needs in the area became clear, especially after COVID-19 restrictions began.

“It was just an overwhelming need, not only for food, but also culturally relevant food,” said Campbell. “In particular with communities that are really concerned about their own safety and the safety of their families, because many of the communities of color in this area are disproportionately impacted by COVID.”

Though the organization prioritized food, the facility’s stock grew to keep more and more housewares, clothing and hygiene items per

See **PANTRY 9A**

Lions look to leadership from new coach

Joe Polamalu takes over the Lions' football den

BY ZEAHNA YOUNG
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With full-contact football being recently given the go-ahead from the governor and Oregon state health officials, Cottage Grove prepares to kick off Season Two (Fall) with new head coach Joe Polamalu.

Polamalu comes in with 12 years of head coaching experience at the high school level, but had taken the 2019 season off, as he explains, “to get close to the family... and it was a good time for me to take some time off... I really enjoyed [it]...”

However, one year off was enough for the coach. As Polamalu says, the decision “came down to having a couple of options for jobs, and where my wife ended up getting her job... We live in Eugene now, so it all kind of worked out; family is nearby, and my kids are close by, so it’s been a good move for us.”

Cottage Grove had been on Polamalu’s radar for quite some time. According to the coach, “Taking a job at Cottage Grove, it’s kind of where I started, at the 4A level, and I always admired Cottage Grove. Not only the talent that they had, and the coaches, but the facilities and the town itself — and how it supported its athletics.

Polamalu had an opportunity to apply for the job, though it had been a few years since he had kept up with Cottage Grove and the 4A level. Polamalu said he didn’t realize where they were at in terms of the program over

See **LIONS 6A**

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