

Polk County Itemizer-Observer

Volume 142, Issue 4

www.Polkio.com

January 25, 2017

\$1.00

Flu comes on strong this year

Still time to get a vaccination

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Flu season is packing a wallop this year, but there's still time to get your flu shot. Local officials say you should, even if you are healthy and not among high-risk groups, because it will stop the spread of the influenza virus.

"Flu season is in full swing here in Oregon, and it's shaping up to be the worst season we've seen in the last few years," said Kirk Hillebrand, Polk County communicable disease nurse. "The exact cause is unknown at this time, but may be partly due to the predominant strain we've been seeing — AH3. Some experts believe it to be a more serious strain of flu."

County-specific statistics aren't available, but statewide numbers indicate cases are still on the rise, but not as sharply as the last few weeks in December and early January. During those weeks, the number of visits to emergency rooms with flu-like symptom skyrocketed.

During the week of Jan. 8-14 — the last week of statistics available — 1,274 tests were positive for influenza. Of those, 1,220 were influenza type AH3, according to Flu Bites, the weekly surveillance report of influenza and respiratory viruses. Cumulative statistics for the season are 6,714 positive tests statewide, 97 percent of which are type AH3.

Hillebrand said locally, the most noticeable effect of this harsher-than-normal flu season has been at long-term care facilities.

"Since the beginning of January, there have been three flu outbreaks in long-term care facilities in Polk County," Hillebrand said. "Some of the outbreaks may be contributed to relatively low vaccination rates among staff."

See FLU, Page 6A

Avoid the Flu

- Get the seasonal flu vaccine: The majority of flu is spread by young, healthy, unvaccinated children and adults. That's why vaccination is such an important part of flu prevention. Flu vaccine is recommended for people 6 months and older.
- Wash your hands: Use soap and warm water. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home if you get sick and do not return to work or school until 24 hours after a fever breaks.
- Clean work and household surfaces often.
- Wear a mask if you have a weakened immune system.
- Ask your family, friends and health providers to get a flu vaccination.
- Practice good health habits: Get plenty of sleep and exercise, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat healthy food.
- Manage any chronic conditions.

—Source: Oregon Health Authority



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

Attendees at the community homelessness forum on Thursday learned about the resources available in Polk County and shared ideas about how the community can help.

HOMELESS

Community combines forces to help people in need

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — To afford an average two-bedroom apartment in Dallas, a person must have a job offering \$14.36 per hour. In Oregon, 40 percent of jobs pay less than \$15 per hour.

Those stats were part of a pop quiz put together by the Salem Interfaith Hospitality Network given to attendees at a community forum on Thursday addressing homelessness in the area.

Another number: Rental vacancy rate in Dallas in 2015; 0.76 percent.

Those statistics paint just one part of the picture facing people and families struggling with homelessness in the Polk County area.

Thursday's meeting, hosted at Valley Life Center in Dallas, was the first of its kind that Brent DeMoe, director of Polk County's Family and Community Outreach department, can remember in the time he's

worked with the county.

"We're not going to solve everything in 90 minutes, but we've never had a meeting like this in the decade that I've worked here, so this is a really good start," he said.

Nearly 80 people attended the meeting, including individuals from county government, law enforcement, churches, and schools. It was designed to inform people of the resources available to people and to brainstorm actions to make the situation better.

Polk County doesn't have a traditional homeless shelter, but does have resources available to homeless people, including transportation to shelters in the Salem area.

T.J. Putnam, the executive director of the Salem Interfaith Hospitality Network, said the organization has been branching out from Salem to Polk County, starting with a partnership with Christ Church in Monmouth.

The organization works with church congregations to provide lodging and meals. SIHN helps families with finding work and housing.

"In the last three years, every family we've helped has been able to leave the shelter for their own home," Putnam said. "It's a testament of parents who want a better life for their kids and a community that can come along side of them to support them."

The Salvation Army offers a similar program at its Lighthouse Shelter in Salem, which has 50 beds for men and 33 for women.

The shelter runs a six-month transition program to help residents get back on their feet.

People do not have to live in Salem to use the shelter. In fact, shelter workers will drive to pick people up, said Melissa Baurer, the director of social services at The Salvation Army.

See FORUM, Page 6A

IN YOUR TOWN

DALLAS

City to borrow \$1.75 million to purchase property surrounding Mercer Reservoir.

»Page 2A

FALLS CITY

Falls City to look at making codes more business and development friendly.

»Page 6A

INDEPENDENCE

Central senior Marlon Tuipulotu commits to USC.

»Page 11A

MONMOUTH

Western Oregon's women's basketball team defeats Northwest Nazarene.

»Page 12A

SPORTS

Dallas' wrestling team takes second at the Reser's Tournament of Champions.

»Page 11A

POLK COUNTY

Committee agrees to raises for county elected officials.

»Page 3A

Newsletter

Want to be more connected? Sign-up to receive the I-O newsletter. Head to www.polkio.com and input your email address and you're good to go!

Monmouth shows off senior center expansion

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Hundreds gathered at the Monmouth Senior Center on Thursday for its open house and ribbon cutting, celebrating the 2,133-square-foot expansion project.

The \$520,000 addition was paid for through fundraising from the Friends of the Monmouth Senior Center, coupled with contributions from the city of Monmouth as well as grants from Ford Family Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon Community Fund and the Collins Fund.

While the actual construction was speedy — the ground-breaking was in the summer of 2016 — securing the money took more

than a decade.

It was worth the effort, and the wait, Senior Center Director Sue Teal said Thursday.

The center had run out of space to accommodate all the activities and classes community members wanted.

New rooms have been added to the building to allow people to enjoy a class or card game without disruption — even if another event is happening in the main room, Teal said.

The addition of a generous storage space makes the multipurpose room feel larger, she noted, since it will no longer be needed for tables and chairs.

One of the most exciting additions is the bathrooms.

"There are enough of

them," Teal said. "The bathrooms were one of our main reasons for expanding. We continued to grow, and our bathrooms haven't."

Another issue: The bathrooms weren't accessible to those with mobility issues. Now they are.

Teal wants the community to know it is their center.

"We're open to suggestions," she said. "People have wants and needs, and we'd like them to tell us what they would like."

The senior center is open to all, not just those over a certain age.

With the expansion completed, there is still work to do, furniture to purchase.

Monthly breakfasts will continue to raise money to support the ongoing wish list of items for the center.



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Pat Jaffer (center) grabs a slice of cake, donated by Roth's Fresh Markets, at the Monmouth Senior Center's open house and ribbon cutting on Thursday.

THE NEXT
7
DAYS
PLANNING
FOR YOUR
WEEK



wed
Mark the 70th anniversary of Dallas Retirement Village with a celebration and ribbon cutting, and tour the facility.
11 a.m. Free.

Cloudy
Hi: 45
Lo: 33

thu
Dallas Senior Center will host an Elvis Music Jam, open to all. Bring finger food to share with friends and enjoy the music.
6:30 p.m. Free.

Partly sunny
Hi: 46
Lo: 31

fri
Donate blood and save a life at the Dallas United Methodist Church on LaCreole Drive.
redcrossblood.org.
1-6 p.m. Free.

Partly cloudy
Hi: 47
Lo: 29

sat
Polk Community Free Clinic will be at Trinity Lutheran Church for those who are uninsured or under-insured.
7-11 a.m. Free.

Sunny
Hi: 45
Lo: 31

sun
Help put the pieces together by taking part in National Puzzle Day.

Partly cloudy
Hi: 46
Lo: 33

mon
Join the Willamette Valley New Horizons Orchestra and discover a hidden talent for music. Open to all music levels.
6:30 p.m. \$25/mo.

Partly cloudy
Hi: 45
Lo: 33

tue
Take your little ones to the library for interactive story times.
Dallas: 10:30 a.m.
Indy: 2 p.m.
Mon: 10:15 a.m.

Showers
Hi: 46
Lo: 37