

Local & State



Cody Miller, owner of the Grocery Outlet store in Baker City, said employees have been focusing on sanitizing the store and washing their hands frequently.

GROCERIES

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He ordered seven pallets stacked with tissue.
“That’s unheard of,” Miller said.

It was gone in about a day. Eventually, Miller said, employees simply let customers grab packages right off the pallet rather than try to keep restocking the shelves. Miller said Grocery Outlet, which has warehouses in Portland and in Sacramento, is working to replenish those facilities and, eventually, the stores with toilet paper and a variety of other products. But in the meantime, as he strolled the aisles Sunday morning, Miller said shoppers can find most types of foods and beverages.

He said that’s not been the case with some Grocery Outlet stores in larger cities, based on what he’s seen and heard from other owners. “We don’t look like pictures I’ve seen of other stores,” Miller said. “I don’t think people here have panicked as much, based on what I’ve seen on the news.” Shoppers have focused on such staples as rice — Grocery Outlet warehouses are already low on that grain, although Miller expects to receive more this week — canned soups, vegetables and fruits, ramen noodles and, that fixture in casseroles, tuna fish. “Tuna’s been selling like crazy,” Miller said. “Quantity-wise that’s probably been one of my top items.”

“We still look like a grocery store, just a little beat up in sections. If people are looking to get grocery staples, they’re going to get them.”

— **Cody Miller, owner, Grocery Outlet store in Baker City**

He said he ordered 20 cases of Hot Pockets — frozen handheld meat and cheese pies that can be microwaved — but they were nearly gone Sunday morning. Because canned foods and ramen are typically popular anyway, Miller said he had a goodly supply of those even before the coronavirus came to dominate discussions. “We still look like a grocery store, just a little beat up in some sections,” he said. “If people are looking to get grocery staples, they’re going to get them.” He said that overall, sales more than doubled during the weekend. Miller said the number of customers also increased but not by that much. The difference, he said, is that most customers bought more than they usually do. If toilet paper isn’t the definitive product of the coronavirus crisis then disinfectant wipes probably are. Miller said he had a big sale on the wipes just a couple weeks ago, so he had ordered a larger-than-usual supply. But like the toilet paper, those were picked clean. “I wish I had bought more,” Miller said. He said the store does have ample supplies of sanitizer for the building itself, and

employees are frequently disinfecting checkout stands and other areas, as well as making sure to wash their hands often. Although the aisles were tranquil Sunday morning, Miller said the store was so crowded at times during the weekend that he assigned two employees to unload pallets so they could be moved out of the way as quickly as possible and not impede the influx of shoppers. Miller said he has not changed his store hours. Nor has he raised prices. “I don’t think that’s an ethical thing to do,” he said. Miller said most customers have been patient despite the occasional shortages and crowded checkout lines. “Customers have been very supportive,” he said. Miller said he was gratified to read a comment on the store’s Facebook page from a customer who thanked a Grocery Outlet cashier who gave her the toilet paper he had already paid for. The customer wrote that she operates an adult foster home and had run out of toilet paper. The customer was planning to buy napkins instead, but the cashier insisted she take his toilet paper and refused the offer of money for it. “That’s one of the best

things I’ve ever had said (about the store),” Miller said. The situation appeared similar at Baker City’s Albertsons and Safeway stores, with empty spaces on some aisles but most shelves well-stocked. Albertsons had a limited stock of toilet paper Sunday morning. In an email to the Herald, Jill McGinnis, director of communications and public affairs for the company that owns both stores, wrote that: “We are working hard in our stores and distribution centers to refill high demand items as quickly as possible, and as supply chain allows. In many cases, we are working through allocations set by manufacturers and distributors. Currently, Safeway and Albertsons are limiting the purchase of some of these items to broaden availability to more of our neighbors. We have appreciated the patience and understanding of our customers as we do our best to meet their needs.” Miller said he is pondering setting limits on the purchases of certain items, including toilet paper, but he’s optimistic that the demand for some items will wane, even when new shipments arrive. “I think everybody’s pretty much paped up,” he said. And although he rewarded his staff with pizza Saturday night, Miller said he’s temporarily suspended one symbol of unity. “No high-fives,” he said with a smile.

Governor: Take-out only at restaurants

By Gillian Flaccus and Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Gov. Kate Brown on Monday ordered the closure of bars and restaurants for four weeks to fight the spread of coronavirus, making Oregon the latest state to make such a sweeping move. “I know Oregonians are some of the most resourceful people in the country and in times of crisis we come together and support each other,” Brown said. “I’m asking you to do that now. Isolation and separation from our friends and neighbors is the only way to flatten the curve and get through to the other side.” Takeout service would still be allowed in Oregon restaurants. Nearly 150 restaurant owners had signed an online petition by Monday asking Brown to order such a shutdown. The owners have suffered a loss of business but cannot qualify for a loss of business insurance until there is a government order to close. “We fear that by remaining open even in limited capacity, we are amplifying the COVID-19 crisis, not doing our part to flatten the curve or care for the community we so passionately serve. Yet we cannot close our businesses without your support,” the letter read. Earlier Brown had said that elected officials around the state told her that restaurants provide a lot of meals to the elderly and vulnerable people, especially in rural communities. Those groups of Oregonians are also the most at-risk of infection from the coronavirus. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday ordered all restaurants and bars to close down, though restaurants can still offer takeout and delivery services. Many other governors around the country have issued similar bans, including Illinois, Ohio and Massachusetts, and some cities have taken the same actions. Brown also told reporters in a conference call that a White House “testing czar” said private labs will have the capacity to do 1 million tests this week, 2 million next week and 5 million the week after for COVID-19.



Brown

COUNTY

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Commissioner Bruce Nichols and Gary Timm, deputy director of the county’s emergency management division, will coordinate that effort. Nancy Staten, administrator for the Baker County Health Department, recommended residents stay home if they feel ill and to practice good hygiene, include frequent hand-washing. She also urged residents to help their neighbors if needed. “We’re all in this together,” Staten said. “We’re all going to do our best.” Sheriff Travis Ash said that for about the past month, emergency dispatchers have added to their usual list of questions for 9-1-1 callers ones dealing with foreign travel. The purpose, Ash said, is to ensure that emergency responders are prepared to take necessary precautions if they treat a prospective coronavirus patient. In addition to the health concerns, Bennett said county officials also want to minimize the economic harm caused by the pandemic, including limits on public gatherings and restrictions on restaurants (see story above). “We don’t want to see firms inappropriately impacted by this,” Bennett said. Commission Chairman Bill Harvey, along with Jason Yencopal, the county’s emergency management director, will lead the campaign to help businesses, including working with the Small Business Administration on potential financial aid. Harvey encouraged residents to support local businesses during the crisis. He said he does not support requiring restaurants and bars to close. Nichols said he’s “quite worried about small businesses in Baker.” “If you’re going to buy something, please buy local as best as you can,” Nichols said.

Coronavirus closures, cancellations

The Herald is updating the list on our Facebook page and website, www.bakercityherald.com, as new information arrives.

United Methodist churches
All local United Methodist Churches in Baker City, Haines, North Powder, Cove and La Grande canceled worship on Sunday, March 22. Various church activities have been canceled, including the final Community Soup Luncheon at Haines United Methodist Church on March 29.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worldwide has canceled all Church meetings and activities until further notice. The Family History Center at the church in Baker City will also be closed. Families are encouraged to study the “Come Follow Me Book of Mormon 2020” manual and have Church at home.

Fish fries
Fish fries at St. Francis de Sales Cathedral in Baker City for March 20 and April 3 have been canceled.

Farmers Market Symposium
The Baker City Farmers Market symposium scheduled for March 28 has been postponed. The new date will be announced when it has been set.

Baker County Library
As of Monday afternoon the library remained open, but officials have posted “enter at your own risk” signs at the doors. The library offers hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes for patrons. Criteria that could prompt a closure, according to Library Director Perry Stokes, include any of the following:
• A case of epidemic disease caused by “community spread” is reported in a neighboring county, or within Baker County.
• Local businesses (food service) are recommended to close, or ordered closed, by a government authority.
• Library staff are unable to effectively enforce “social distancing” of congregations of library visitors in close contact.
If the library does close, pickup and dropoff service likely would continue at the drive-up window, Stokes said.

Baker County Garden Club
Baker County Garden Club has canceled its meeting set for March 18.

Hunter education classes
The hunter education classes scheduled to begin April 3 have been canceled. This was to be one of two conventional classes taught in Baker City this summer. The volunteer instructors of the county have decided to not reschedule the spring class, and to hold only one conventional class this year. It will be in August and information about it is available on the ODFW website. As of now an online field day scheduled for April 18 is still on. If students wish they can secure the home study information either a home study work book, or take the online program and register for this field day if they wish to complete the program this spring. If the student wants to attend the conventional class the only option will be the August class. The April 18 field day is subject to change should the state decide to extend the current closures. More information is available from Bill Taylor, 541-403-0900.

Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort
Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort will continue with normal ski area operations, services, and operating schedule with the exception of the cancellation of the annual Taste of Nordic event (March 22) and Broadway Blast ski race (March 21-22). The ski area is continuing to take all appropriate precautions for coronavirus recommended by local health officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including the following:
• Removing any self-serve food from the café
• Thoroughly disinfecting our facilities and surfaces
• Reminding all employees and peers about best practices regarding hand washing and frequent cleaning of work area surfaces

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MON-THURS: 7:00

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