

Sweet 16 in the era of coronavirus

■ Sydney Lamb’s friends made her birthday special even with social distancing

By Lisa Britton
For the Baker City Herald

Turning 16 isn’t quite the same in the era of social distancing, but friends made sure Sydney Lamb felt special on her birthday Tuesday.

At 4 p.m., a parade of nearly 20 vehicles drove slowly past Lamb’s house in Baker City. Every driver blared horns and passengers yelled “happy birthday!” out the open windows. Some were decorated with balloons and others had signs wishing Lamb a happy day.

Quite a few tossed presents onto the lawn for Lamb to collect after the impromptu parade.



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

Sydney Lamb’s friends threw her a 16th birthday party Tuesday that reflected social distancing guidelines.

The cars lined up at 3:45 p.m. a few blocks away near Marianne Stone’s house.

“I think it was a fun, safe and responsible way to provide an act of kindness for

Syd,” Stone said. “So many kids are really struggling emotionally — I think it’s important we provide them with positive support and inspire others to do the same.”

“I think it was a fun, safe and responsible way to provide an act of kindness.”

— Marianne Stone

Day care options for essential workers

By Corey Kirk
ckirk@bakercityherald.com

As the coronavirus continues to ravage across the country, most Americans are self-quarantining due to recommendation of both the government and the CDC to pursue social distancing.

With public schools closed at least until April 28 — and possibly for the rest of the school year — some schools are being used as emergency day care for the children of first responders and essential healthcare workers.

“It’s critical, especially if things turn a little more challenging here from a health perspective,” said Mark Witty, Baker School District superintendent. “We were willing participants, we jumped right on it and we got a system in place.”

In conjunction with Child Care Resource and Referral, the Baker School District has opened Brooklyn Primary School as day care for children of people in the medical field.

After the first week, six children have been spending time at the temporary day

“We have several in-home day care providers here in Baker County that have filled out their paperwork. We are definitely telling other essential workers that is another option for them, and I will give them a referral for who has availability.”

— CaSandra Zeller, Child Care Resource and Referral

care center at Brooklyn.

“It’s been a slow start, but as we move into next week we will be having nine,” Witty said.

CaSandra Zeller of Child Care Resource and Referral said it’s imperative that workers at Brooklyn comply with safe sanitation practices.

“Teachers and caregivers are encouraged to take temperatures of children upon arrival, and make sure that the group of ten students is a stable group of ten,” Zeller said. “Those ten children will stay in that group and we don’t have other children coming and going.”

Private day care centers can remain open as long as they sign up for emergency services, meaning that, like schools, they can provide care

of the children of essential healthcare workers.

“We have several in-home day care providers here in Baker County that have filled out their paperwork,” Zeller said. “We are definitely telling other essential workers that is another option for them, that they can contact me and I will give them a referral for who has availability.”

As many at-home day cares begin to mull over the idea of hosting emergency services, officials want business owners and these essential employees to maintain consistencies with their day care options to prevent possibly any spreading of the virus, resulting in half of these businesses opting to remain closed.

“We have providers that are in the at-risk category

themselves, maybe having a relative in their home who is at-risk, and so inviting children into their homes with parents that are more active in the community right now would put them at higher risk and (they) decide to close,” Zeller said.

Though the school districts will tend to those in the medical field, Child Care Resource and Referral encourages those still clocking into work to reach out and they will help them find their own accommodations.

“If they are in need of childcare while they work it would be much better to utilize this pop up emergency site, or contact me at Child Care Resource and Referral so I can get them placed in a childcare home with somebody that is well-trained in caring for kids,” Zeller said.

People who may feel that they qualify for these emergency services would be able to have their employer contact Baker School District 5J or Zeller at Child Care Resource and Referral at czeller@umchs.org

‘Normal’ situation for Baker City paramedics

By Chris Collins
ccollins@bakercityherald.com

Baker City firefighters, who also are the paramedics and EMTs who board the ambulances to provide medical transports throughout most of the county, are poised to respond when called to a patient who might be ill with COVID-19.

So far, there have been no cases of a positive test for the coronavirus in Baker County.

“The situation is normal,” says Sean Lee, who has served as interim fire chief since Feb. 26 when former chief John Clark resigned to accept a new job at North Whidbey Island Fire-Rescue in Washington.

Clark had planned to be available for weekend service through April 4, until the coronavirus restrictions made travel impossible.

“He came back for one Saturday, and we’ve had teleconferences,” Lee said. The two men will have their last teleconference this Saturday.

Lee, 55, has served for about three years as chief of the Baker Rural Fire Protection District. He had been working closely with Clark on several projects and it made sense to appoint Lee to the part-time temporary job, City Manager Fred Warner Jr. said at the time.

When he’s not at a fire department, Lee is producing and selling hay on his small ranch in the Wingville area where he also has some horses. In his spare time he also dabbles as a cabinetmaker.

Lee said he is enjoying his new role with the city, but was quick to add, “The timing was terrible. Other than that, it’s going really well.”

Department morale is high despite the reality that a coronavirus ambulance run could be just around the corner, Lee said.

“This is a good bunch of people. Everybody is in good spirits,” he said. “Everybody is taking care of themselves and staying healthy.”

Because Baker County has yet to see its first confirmed coronavirus case, there has been time to get preventive measures in place, Lee said.

“We’re tentatively waiting. The hospital is prepared, we’re prepared. I think it will go well,” Lee said.

Meanwhile, if a call comes in reporting symptoms that might indicate COVID-19, ambulance personnel make sure they have face shields, isolation gowns and gloves available for use.

Those symptoms, which have been reported and repeated throughout most of March, include a cough, fever and trouble breathing.

Just last week the state Fire Marshal’s Office delivered a large supply of personal protection equipment that was shared with departments throughout the county, and Lee doesn’t anticipate a shortage.

Advance warning from the patients the crews are serving will be their best line of defense, he said.

“We’re asking people to be honest when they call dispatch,” Lee said. “We’re going to be there. We’re going to treat them like an everyday call. We just want to be prepared.”

The fire station, like most public buildings in the community, is locked down and only Fire Department personnel are allowed inside, Lee said.

“Right now we don’t even need a cold in here,” he said.

Lee is optimistic about the pandemic.

“Hopefully this will just blow by us,” he said.

FLOWERS

Continued from Page 1A

Hearts and Petals delivered about 50 bouquets during March.

“It’s been fun,” Anderson said.

She said she heard from employees at nursing homes who said the flowers brightened residents’ days.

“They just love the fresh flowers,” Anderson said.

Hearts and Petals invited customers to call the shop and sponsor a bouquet. They could choose a preferred destination, although Anderson said she tried to spread the flowers equally among the homes.

Anderson and shop owner Denise Harmon intend to make March Kindness a yearly campaign with plans to do it again next March to continue spreading kindness.

For April, Anderson said they are in the process of planning April Appreciation that will focus on those on the front lines of the coronavirus crisis.

Customers will be able to sponsor bouquets for firefighters, EMTs, police officers, doctors and nurses, emergency dispatchers and others.

Anderson said it’s a way to “let all those front line people know they are appreciated.”

Anderson and Harmon are still working on the details of the campaign, including contacting other local businesses and partnering with them to put something together.

After the flowers have wilted, Hearts and Petals takes back the vases for use in a new bouquet.

“It helps keep it going,” Harmon said.

Hearts and Petals’ phone number is 541-523-9434.

Commissioners give COVID-19 update

By Samantha O’Conner
soconner@bakercityherald.com

The Baker County Commissioners on Wednesday had their first meeting broadcast via the internet and by phone to allow residents to attend remotely.

Commissioners gave a coronavirus update. Commission Chairman Bill Harvey encouraged people who are feeling ill to call their medical provider first.

“Do not just go, because you could infect others or yourself even more so,” Harvey said. “We are mindful of your needs, but help us to help you by doing these things for us as well, please.”

Commissioner Mark Bennett said the county has restructured its emergency management system to respond to the unique challenges of the pandemic.

“We still have as our number one priority, obviously, is the health and coordination between medical facilities,” Bennett said.

He said county officials are working with all of the cities

within the county, special districts, and the state of Oregon.

Bennett said a principal focus continues to be public information — “getting out good, clear public information.”

Testing for coronavirus remains a challenge, with tests in short supply and results taking a week or longer.

As of Wednesday, 13 Baker County residents had been tested — all were negative.

“We’re still working on the testing,” said Bennett. “That’s been a big challenge within the state of Oregon.”

Commissioner Bruce Nichols is leading the county’s human services section, intended to help citizens who have needs such as getting groceries and medication, and other needs caused by restrictions related to the pandemic.

Information and contact options for the human services are listed on the county’s coronavirus website — www.bakercountycovid19.com/

“We’re attempting to really diligently make that a one-stop site,” Bennett said.

Harvey said: “What I’d like

to emphasize (is) this is very confusing not only to the public at the federal level because of all the things that they are proposing, have voted on, and have not implemented as of yet. Mark’s efforts in putting these teams together is to give you contact information for that specific purpose that might affect you.”

“So please be patient with us until we can get the actual information. We would be glad to help work through those efforts to help you in making those connections you need to,” Harvey said.

Commissioners are also seeking to find ways to help businesses deal with the unprecedented loss of revenue.

“Our goal is to have the least impact to folks as possible with this, so I can’t stress enough to shelter in place, think wisely when you’re doing things as far as social distancing but at the same time still support our local businesses that are open, our restaurants,” Bennett said.

The Courthouse remains closed to public access, and

county offices have limited staffing, though they’re accessible through email and phone. Contacts are listed on the county’s website.

Potential loss of state revenue

Commissioners also discussed the potential for state revenue to the county dropped by up to 30% due to coronavirus control efforts.

“The state is going to have to pull back on the funds they’ve passed through to the counties,” Harvey said.

Bennett said he believes the county should limit spending until more information is available.

“This is such uncharted waters and we’re in a fog because the legislature hasn’t met and given us any indication of what they’re doing,” Bennett said.

“We’re just saying for the moment, in order that we can get a clear picture of what’s happening, we believe we should pause these expenditures.”

Harvey said projects that are already under way will continue.

PATIENTS

Continued from Page 1A

Patients will be tested according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations. Due to these factors, not everyone who is evaluated will be tested for COVID-19. Leadership from both facilities are staying updated on all upcoming testing

options, including point of care testing and this will be implemented as soon as it becomes available.

The goals of the curbside assessment site are:

- To provide assessment of respiratory symptoms
- Testing for COVID-19 if indicated
- Triage to higher level of care if necessary

- Prevent further spread of respiratory illness by keeping sick patients out of clinics and the ER

Qualifications for COVID-19 testing, based on most recent CDC guidelines:

- Fever (greater than 100.4°)

AND new cough or shortness of breath

- High risk individuals
- Over age 65, immunosup-

pressed, chronic illnesses such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer or kidney failure on dialysis.

- Pregnant patients
- People who live in assisted living or are incarcerated or are living in another long term residential facility
- Healthcare workers or first responders
- Known COVID-19 exposure

If a patient is evaluated using this resource but does NOT qualify for testing, they will be given guidance for self-quarantine at home, and documentation can be provided for employers who are requesting testing.

For the safety of the colleagues conducting the curbside assessments they request no animals in vehicles that use the service.