

DELIVERY

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Brotherton said he and his wife, Sylvia, 74, have respiratory problems. He is especially protective of his wife, who's been through three bouts of pneumonia.

Jim said he had tried to make arrangements with stores to bring his necessary grocery items to the curb for him to pick up, but without success. And then he recalled a special pizza delivery a former cab company made for him to show his appreciation to the crew at the John Deere equipment dealership. He wondered if this new cab company also could accommodate his desire for shopping and delivery service.

Brotherton said he liked David Sanders' answers to his questions when he called him and soon had made a deal with him.

"He became, over the phone, somebody I could depend on," Brotherton said. "In my opinion, he's a hero."

Brotherton wants to get



Chris Collins/Baker City Herald

David Sanders and his wife, Stephanie, started their taxi company on March 15, the day before widespread restrictions due to the coronavirus were imposed.

the word out to other seniors about this service that brings groceries right to his open garage door.

Sanders drops the groceries inside the garage at the Brothertons' Fairway Heights home, near the Quail Ridge Golf Course, and then Jim disinfects what needs to be disinfected, lets some items sit for a while and takes the rest inside.

"I think he could help out a lot of seniors," Brotherton said. "And they could help

him, too.

"I think they're a really good resource for seniors right now," Brotherton said.

The next encouragement came through calls to the cab company from out-of-town adult children of elderly parents who wanted to ensure that their parents could keep their pantries well-stocked while also protecting themselves from exposure to the illness.

Customers in that category call Elkhorn Taxi from North

Dakota, South Dakota, Michigan, Texas (three) and the Oregon Coast (two or three), Sanders said.

Word-of-mouth has helped the service grow. The grocery stores have even recommended the taxi service to those who inquire about delivery.

Payment is made by cash or through debit or credit card. After receiving payment with a bad check in his first month of operation, Sanders said he quickly decided he would not accept any more checks.

His shopping service is flexible and it's not unusual for Sanders to stop at Albertsons for grocery items and then travel to Safeway for a prescription order for the same customer.

His first experience driving a taxi cab came in a nine-month stint working for the now-defunct Baker City Cab service. Before opening his own business, David had also worked as a manager at Step Forward where Stephanie has continued to work in management as well as driving the taxi as needed. The couple

started the cab company to fill a need that existed when the community's other cab companies quit operating last year.

David said he had always wanted to be self-employed and he enjoyed driving cab as an employee working for someone else. He was sure running a cab company as his own business would be even better.

Except for the financial squeeze caused by the coronavirus pandemic, he believes he made a good choice for his future and to provide a needed service in the community.

"That is what we were out to do, to provide a service the town needed," Sanders said. "We definitely have a lot of people who are appreciative that we have a taxi service up and running."

To ease the concern of his customers over COVID-19, although no cases have yet been confirmed in Baker County, Sanders is conscientious about keeping himself and his vehicle, a Kia Sedona minivan, clean. He disinfects the van after every taxi run and grocery delivery.

"I take all the proper precautions, using hand sanitizer, washing my hands and washing my clothes. I change clothes as often as I can," he said.

And he wears a mask.

His customers also are concerned about his health. One woman who pays in cash, wraps her money in Lysol cleaning wipes to ensure she's not passing any germs along with the transaction, he said.

David said he and Stephanie are especially grateful for the support they've received from the community.

"We really appreciate everybody that's been giving us a call for a taxi ride or for groceries," David said.

"I really didn't know if this was going to work," he added. "But thanks to the support of the community it has, and we're very thankful."

More information about how to schedule a taxi ride or to hire the taxi service to pick up and deliver groceries is available by calling Elkhorn Taxi at 541-519-6196.

County could join in grant application

By Samantha O'Conner
soconner@bakercityherald.com

Baker County might join Union and Wallowa counties, and the city of La Grande, in applying for a federal grant to help ailing businesses during the coronavirus pandemic.

Baker County commissioners discussed a possible intergovernmental agreement for a Community Development Block Grant at their meeting Wednesday.

They authorized Commissioner Bruce Nichols to represent the county in the matter.

La Grande would sponsor the application, Nichols said. The grant would provide technical assistance and help for either businesses that provide medical services, food delivery, cleaning and other services to support the health of people in quarantine, or for businesses in general.

No decision has been made about how the grant money would be targeted, or how much money

the coalition of counties might seek.

Nichols said the goal is to get money to businesses that county officials believe would benefit most.

The counties would have a "major say so in what's going on," Nichols said. "That's what this is all about. And it's about getting money out there quickly."

Commissioners will resume a discussion of the proposal when more details are available.

In other business Wednesday, commissioners approved the first reading of an ordinance designed to streamline the county's use of gravel pits.

Roadmaster Noodle Perkins, who participated in the meeting remotely, said the state geology department reviews how much material is removed from each of the nearly 30 pits the county has registered.

The ordinance will allow the county to administer its own

mining and reclamation plans, Perkins said.

"We still have to follow the rules, like anybody else, but we don't have to depend on (the state) to come out and do an inspection before we mine, after we mine, during when we mine," Perkins said. "We just have to report to them if we have any large amounts of rock coming out of the pits anywhere that's outside of the permit."

Coronavirus update

Commissioner Mark Bennett said Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande is slated to receive testing instruments that provide negative results within five minutes, and positive results within 15 minutes.

"That was confirmed yesterday," Bennett said. "When that's going to arrive and will there be enough test medium, I don't know."

As of Wednesday, Baker County remained one of five of Oregon's

36 counties with no confirmed cases of coronavirus.

The goal is to make those available in Baker County if possible, Bennett said.

Three liaisons from the Oregon National Guard will be in Baker County to work with the county's emergency management team, Bennett said.

Two nurses from the Medical Reserve Corps have arrived in the county and are working with the Health Department.

"We're still in a state of flux there but it looks like it's stabilized a great deal," Bennett said.

He encourages people to visit the county's website, www.bakercountycovid19.com, for information.

In response to Gov. Kate Brown's announcement Tuesday that the state is working on a plan for reopening the economy, Bennett said the county's management team is putting together a local recovery plan.

VIRUS

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Indeed, the combined populations of those four counties is only slightly higher — 18,870 — than Baker County's 16,820.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Baker County had tallied 40 negative tests for the virus. Another 13 tests were pending, according to the Baker County Health Department.

Gilliam County, population 1,990, had 16 negative tests; Harney County, population 7,360, had 45 negative tests; Lake County, population 8,080, had 47 negatives tests and Wheeler County, Oregon's least-populous with 1,440 residents, had six negative tests.

Baker City physician Eric Lamb, the county's public health officer, said last week that "in the coming weeks we will undoubtedly see COVID-19 in our county."

Only people who meet the CDC guidelines are being tested. Lamb urges people with minor symptoms to self-quarantine at home and to call their medical provider if they have questions.

Among counties that border Baker County, Union and Malheur counties both have four confirmed cases, while Grant and Wallowa counties both have a single confirmed case.

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