

## COUNTY

*Continued from Page 1A*

“So, we’re trying to be right out there on the forefront,” Bennett said. “We recognize the need to get all of our businesses back in operation.”

Findley and Owens, the two legislators who also represent Baker County in the Legislature, on Friday sent a letter to Brown proposing a pilot program in Harney County, which also hasn’t had a confirmed case of the virus, for beginning to reopen businesses there based on the criteria the governor outlined in a Tuesday press conference.

Jean Oglesbee submitted questions on the virtual platform for the town hall — are grocery workers going to start wearing gloves and masks? Should people wear masks into the stores?

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said some workers are already wearing gloves and masks, and he believes it is up to each business to decide what to require.

Some stores have set up signs asking customers to walk in one direction only in aisles to make it easier to comply with social distancing recommendations.

Harvey said each person can decide whether to wear masks, gloves

and take other precautions.

Oglesbee also asked if commissioners know when hand sanitizers and disinfectant wipes will become available in stores again.

Harvey said hand sanitizer is coming back in small quantities, but wipes are not.

“The best thing you can do is wash your hands as often as possible,” Harvey said.

Baker City Mayor Loran Joseph submitted the CDC-recommended recipe for disinfectant — 1/3 cup bleach to one gallon of water to disinfect nonporous surfaces.

Glacier 45 Distillery in Baker City, which normally makes vodka, has produced sanitizer and donated the product to some local businesses.

“Hopefully somebody else will come up with it too, where they can continue making some,” Commissioner Bruce Nichols said.

Nancy Staten, administrator at the Baker County Health Department, gave an update on the COVID-19 numbers in Oregon.

As of Friday there were 1,785 confirmed cases in Oregon, and 70 deaths. A total of 36,321 people have been tested in the state.

Staten said data will be forthcoming from the state about the number of people who were infected but have

recovered.

“There are many unanswered questions regarding COVID-19,” Staten said. “Even though we have no positive cases here in our rural county and are smaller and less populated, we still need to take this seriously and do everything we can to prevent the spread of this disease.”

Baker City doctor Eric Lamb, the county’s public health officer, said earlier this month that the county would “undoubtedly” have confirmed cases of the virus before the pandemic ends.

Bennett recognized and thanked all those who stepped up in helping the community.

“We’re really honored to be serving you and we are proud to live in this county, in this community, that we are all coming together to work on this extreme challenge together and everybody has really been going above and beyond,” said Bennett.

Bennett noted that Sheriff Travis Ash and his staff are working to address public safety concerns and assisting with putting tents up to help the hospital if necessary.

Commissioners are also working to help local businesses and residents who are affected by the

pandemic — particularly in a financial sense.

After dipping slightly the week ending April 4, new unemployment claims rose again the week ending April 11 to 139 claims — topping the previous high of 129 claims for the week ending March 28.

“What a tragedy it would be that we were able to pull through the health piece but then just go into a recession or some severe economic downturns,” Bennett said.

Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr. attended the virtual meeting to discuss the campaigns such as the Shop Local effort, which encourages businesses to support each other by offering discounts to customers who present receipts from other local businesses.

“Nobody really thinks we’re just going to open up, we’re going to transition this and we want to make sure that our businesses are ready to do that,” Warner said.

He added that officials are also looking at ways to welcome tourists while still practicing social distancing and other tactics to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

“Anything we can do to social distance and keep our businesses thriving, we’re going to do,” Warner said.

## FOOD

*Continued from Page 1A*

Bland said The Salvation Army has delivered to people elsewhere in the county, including Huntington, Richland and Halfway, as well as in Baker City.

“We’re getting as many people in a group so we can make that all at once,” Bland said. “Everyone gets a box every 30 days.”

Each box has seven meals for each person.

Bland said The Salvation Army distributed 322 boxes during March, compared to 188 in February.

Safeway and Albertsons donate produce and baked goods, and The Salvation Army also accepts both monetary donations and food, particularly nonperishable items such as canned fruits and vegetables and boxed meals kits.

Donations can be made when the food bank is open, or call 541-523-5853 to arrange a time to make the donation.

The Northeast Oregon Compassion Center is also working to help the community. Russ Armstrong, who has been a board member for several years, said the Center has also seen an increase in demand since the pandemic started.

Prior to that, about 12 to 15 people per week were receiving food, Armstrong said. Recently

## DONATE

*Continued from Page 1A*

The Defrees family has joined with several other Baker County ranchers to buy about 3,500 pounds of beef and donate it to local food banks operated by The Salvation Army and the Northeast Oregon Compassion Center, said Dan Probert, marketing director for Oregon Country Beef.

The beef was delivered to The Salvation Army in Baker City on Friday afternoon.

“This is just a way for us to help out,” Dean Defrees said on Friday.

Probert said that with restaurants limited to offering takeout and delivery orders, the “food service business has basically stopped.”

That has left warehouses

crammed with food — including Country Natural Beef raised by ranchers in Baker County.

About 3,500 pounds of beef was donated Friday to The Salvation Army and the Northeast Oregon Compassion Center in Baker City, both of which continue to operate food banks. Another 1,000 pounds was donated to Community Connection and Meals on Wheels programs in Wallowa County.

Ranchers who bought and donated beef include Tim, Julie and Mark Kerns, Wannie and Beth Mackenzie, John and Nancy Boyer, Chris Stocks, Mike and Jackie Vaughan, Clint and Cassi Johnson, Dan and Jo Warnock, and John, Molly and Zach Wilson.

— Jayson Jacoby

They are still able to do many of their other programs, such as helping domestic violence victims and providing diapers and cribs for families with babies.

The Compassion Center, at the Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane, is also accepting monetary donations to help keep the food bank stocked. The Center’s number is 541-523-9845.

St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church also operates a food bank. Although the church office is closed, people who need assistance can call 541-523-4521 to get information about scheduling an appointment.

Baker City’s Albertsons and Safeway grocery stores are collecting donations from residents that will be donated to local food banks, said Jill McGinnis, director of communications and public affairs for the company that owns both stores.

The stores will also be donating \$10,000 to the Baker School District later this month, McGinnis said. Customers have donated about \$2,000, and the campaign will continue through the end of April. The Safeway Albertsons Foundation will make up any difference to reach the \$10,000 figure, McGinnis said. The money will go to the Backpack Program, which provides food to students during weekends.

## ADJUST

*Continued from Page 1A*

“There was a feeling of letting people down,” Sandy said, referring to the layoffs that resulted when the restaurant’s revenue plummeted to almost nothing in a single day.

“That affected me more than anything,” Dave said of the need to lay off employees.

The couple has applied for a federal loan through the Payroll Protection Program. If the loan is approved, they’ll be able to immediately rehire all their employees, Dave said.

They expected to find out Friday if they’ll receive the loan, he said.

The restaurant won’t need the full staff to handle takeout orders, but he said there is plenty of work to do — a comprehensive spring cleaning that’s already in progress.

Dave said he’s grateful to Glacier 45 Distillery in Baker City, which shifted from producing vodka to

the weekly numbers have been in the 20s.

“We’re still getting some food donations. We’re doing pretty well,” Armstrong said.

He said the center is looking for any kind of food people can donate. Their bags consist of milk, eggs, and butter they get every week and staples such as soup, bread, sugar, flour, and more.

“We use anything that people will donate to us,” Arm-

strong said.

Volunteers at the Compassion Center are also keeping with social distancing by taking bags out to people rather than having them go inside. They are able to keep it going with a couple of volunteers.

“As far as our volunteers, we’re really limited,” Armstrong said.

Like The Salvation Army, the Compassion Center has closed its donated clothing section.

pected.

Rather than incur more expenses with no immediate return on the investment, the couple looked at a window near the entrance that was big enough to accommodate a drive-thru.

The modification cost money but at least it has the prospect of attracting more customers, Dave said.

“I think it’ll make a difference,” he said. “We’re excited about the drive-thru. We don’t want to get left behind.”

Dave admits, though, that he never had any intention of running anything but a traditional sit-down family restaurant.

Window or not, he said, “we’re not a drive-in restaurant.”

Dave said that once the pandemic restrictions cease, he plans to close the drive-thru and resume regular in-house dining.

In the meantime, the couple is revamping the menu to focus on

## Supporting local businesses

Baker County’s coronavirus website — [www.bakercountycovid19.com](http://www.bakercountycovid19.com) — includes links to lists of local restaurants offering takeout and delivery. The website also has links to sites where business owners can apply for loans and other financial assistance.

items such as hamburgers and salads that can be prepared relatively quickly — a key for customers who don’t order ahead, since he doesn’t want diners to have to wait a long time to get their food.

Dave said he’s concerned that even when restaurants can reopen their dining room — Brown has not announced a timeline — that busi-

Sheriff Travis Ash said his department, including the jail and the emergency dispatch center, are fully staffed and healthy.

“I want to let everybody know that the sheriff’s office is here for the community, we’re gonna continue to keep working hard to keep Baker a safe place for all of us to live, work, and raise families,” Ash said.

Nichols, who has been working on the human services aspect of the pandemic, said he has talked with managers at Safeway, Albertsons and Grocery Outlet, and that their supply issues are improving.

Nichols encouraged people to wear masks. He said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website — [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) — has patterns for cloth masks.

“If you make just as many as you can for your community, that’ll help everybody out,” Nichols said.

He said Community Connection, 2810 Cedar St., is a collection point. He will take donated masks to St. Luke’s Eastern Oregon Medical Associates to be washed, and then to be distributed to people at the drive-thru coronavirus symptom evaluation service on the east side of Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City, 3325 Pocahontas Road.

## Snake River camp ban will continue

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, acting as incident commander under the county’s coronavirus emergency declaration, has extended the ban on camping and other overnight use, including fishing, on public areas along the Snake River corridor in Baker County until April 30. The initial two-week closure order was issued on April 4.

The order does not affect private property along the river. The Snake River Road between Richland and Huntington remains open, and daytime activities, including fishing, are open.

“It’s important to emphasize this order is temporary, and the county will lift it as soon as the situation changes in a way that recreation can continue like normal without putting our local residents at risk,” Bennett said.

County officials issued the closure order after receiving complaints from local residents about groups gathering along the river.

## TESTING

*Continued from Page 1A*

Kerns said medical professionals are using criteria from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in deciding whether to test residents.

She said people are being evaluated in several places, including the drive-thru site on the east side of Saint Alphonsus

Medical Center-Baker City, 3325 Pocahontas Road, and at the hospital’s emergency room, where nurses have been evaluating people in their cars in some cases.

Health care officials recommend residents who have symptoms consistent with coronavirus call their medical provider first rather than going to the hospital.

ness will not rebound immediately.

Summer is vital because the increase in tourism helps sustain the restaurant through the slower winter, he said.

“I’m afraid it’s going to be a slow crawl to get back to where we could have been,” Dave said.

Sandy said she knows many other local businesses are facing the same predicament, and she empathizes.

The McGuires said they appreciate the local customers who have continued to patronize their restaurant, as well as their employees, some of whom have offered to volunteer their time.

“We’re very thankful to everybody who has stood behind us,” Sandy said.

Daily menus and drive-thru hours — 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., closed on Mondays and Tuesdays for now — are posted on the Oregon Trail Motel and Restaurant Facebook page.

## ARREST

*Continued from Page 2A*

Speelman was the first Baker County parent to be charged with a crime in connection with the co-sleeping death of a child. Her 5-week-old son, Tracin Ryan Jay Givens, died on Sept. 3, 2016. The baby died of asphyxiation related to co-sleeping, the autopsy report found.

As part of an agreement with the District Attorney’s office, Speelman pleaded

guilty to criminally negligent homicide, a Class B felony, and unlawful possession of methamphetamine, a Class C felony. A third count of second-degree manslaughter, which upon conviction would have carried a mandatory prison term of six years and three months, was dismissed as part of the plea agreement.

Speelman also was found to have been using multiple drugs and there was evidence that she was under the influence of hydrocodone (for which

she had no prescription) at the time of the baby’s death.

Investigators determined that Speelman had been counseled about the risks of co-sleeping with her son before she left Saint Alphonsus Hospital where the baby was born. That, coupled with evidence of drug use, led to the indictment, authorities stated.

On May 18, 2017, visiting Judge Lane Simpson of Lake County sentenced Speelman to six months in the Baker County Jail, with credit for the

more than five months she had served at the jail before sentencing. She was ordered to transfer to an inpatient drug treatment program upon release from jail and to complete three years’ probation. The plea agreement also called for Speelman to serve 22 months in prison if her probation were ever to be revoked.

Co-sleeping came to the attention of law enforcement authorities and members of the medical community after a series of infant deaths linked to

the practice beginning in 2004. An effort led by Matt Shirtcliff, former Baker County district attorney now Baker County Circuit Court judge, and his staff, established a Cribs for Kids program in Baker County.

In 2016, Saint Alphonsus’ Birth Center in Baker City gained the national Cribs for Kids gold level certification for its work to educate parents about how to provide a safe sleeping environment for their infants.

Through the Baker County

Sleep Coalition, free Pack ‘n Play portable cribs are made available at the Northeast Oregon Compassion Center for parents who can’t afford to provide a safe place for their newborns to sleep — in the same room, but not in the same bed, as the parents.

The education program also provides lessons and brochures that are distributed in the community and through high school health classes warning of the dangers of co-sleeping with infants.