

Last call

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We all know what happened next.

"If you had told me last year that in a year we'd be out of business, I wouldn't have believed you," Greg Wales said near last call Wednesday.

Owners of local restaurants and gyms who limped through 2020 are increasingly choosing to close up shop, but some are reopening and risk hefty state fines.

Heather and Greg Wales decided not to openly ignore Gov. Kate Brown's pandemic-related business restrictions. In response to COVID-19, Oregon counties are now categorized according to risk with Deschutes County among the many considered "extreme." In these counties, dining is limited to outdoor-only and gyms and indoor entertainment areas are to remain closed.

Brown on Tuesday announced Deschutes County would remain in the "extreme" set for at least another month. Wales expected to spend part of Friday pouring his remaining inventory, about \$24,000 of beer, down the literal drain in the middle of the floor. He called it his "donation to the city water department." A group of Oregon mayors has supported defying the governor by passing resolutions "opening up" business in their communities.

Redmond Mayor George Endicott acknowledges he doesn't have the power to reopen businesses even if he tried.

"What most people don't realize is that mayors, we have no authority here," he said. "We have persuasive abilities but in this case, the governor is the authority, and regardless of how I personally feel, I cannot direct people to open up their businesses. That comes with risk."

Endicott, 71 and in his 12th year as mayor, says he talks to more and more owners of hospitality and fitness-focused businesses who've chosen to re-open in defiance of the governor's orders, though he declined to identify any. Endicott attended Geist's closing night, sans facemask. He said the Beerworks isn't alone. At the beginning of 2020, Beccerra's on 6th Bistro was bringing fine dining to downtown Redmond. Several months into the pandemic, owners Moises and Sheila Beccerra pulled up stakes and ended their business.

Endicott said the closures hurt, especially in light of how hard officials worked to attract new business to Redmond following the Great Recession.

"There has to be a balance between lives and livelihoods, and I don't think we've found it yet," he said. "In some respects, losing your livelihood is akin

to losing your life." Activists promoting reopening are distinct from right-wing figures like Redmond's BJ Soper, who wants to fully reopen the economy and also are opposed to social distancing measures intended to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Soper refers often to sections of the U.S. and Oregon constitutions as a justification. On Wednesday, he wrote to Deschutes County Sheriff Shane Nelson and the Deschutes County Commission saying the state was at a "crossroads."

"The governor is not an all powerful queen issuing commands over subjects," he wrote to The Bulletin. "She has no authority to tell any individual how to think or act."

It's not an opinion shared by Endicott or Brown, who on Thursday issued a forceful statement chastising local politicians attempting to subvert pandemic-related health and

safety measures, calling them "irresponsible."

"Undoubtedly, those same local elected officials who are encouraging businesses to fully reopen and flagrantly disregard public health are unlikely to have the backs of businesses when faced with fines and penalties, nor are they likely to be willing to be held responsible for the public health impacts their actions create," Brown said.

To business owners considering re-opening in defiance of the law, Brown said she'd directed "all available resources" to aid enforcement by Oregon Occupational Safety and Health and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

"I expect enforcement agencies to continue to use an education first approach, but Oregonians need to understand that these rules are enforceable under law," she said. "For businesses that refuse to comply,

OSHA and OLCC staff are empowered to take administrative action, including issuing citations, fines, and Red Warning Notices if necessary."

An Army vet, Greg Wales' passion for beer making was lit while he was stationed in Germany. He and his wife, a former special education teacher, chose Redmond after researching areas with both good schools and a thriving beer culture.

Wales, 55, said he never considered flouting the governor's rules, in part because black marks on his liquor licenses would follow him to any state in the country should he choose to try to make it somewhere else.

"We're going out peacefully," he said. "Oregon, we love you. Hopefully someday, we can come back, but right now we need to make a living and provide for our children."

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Year in review

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A federal tactical squad sent to Bend by the U.S. attorney for Oregon to extricate immigration agents and two detainees whose departure had been blocked by activists opposed to Trump's aggressive policy on immigration.

A bitter election that swept Trump out of office — though he continues to try every avenue to overturn the result.

All that alone would make for an epic news year. But dominating everything was the worst worldwide pandemic in over 100 years.

So far, COVID-19 has killed 1.8 million around the world, including more than 345,000 in the United States and nearly 1,500 in Oregon.

A pandemic was not on the political radar at the start of 2020. In January, the biggest issue in Oregon was the fate of a carbon cap program in the Legislature. For the second time in two years, Democratic leaders believed they had the votes to pass a bill, but Republicans walked-out to deny the two-thirds attendance of members in each chamber to establish a quorum to consider legislation. Brown then issued an executive order to unilaterally start the process.

The number 19 in COVID-19 designates that it first appeared in 2019. Late that year, a mysterious illness appeared in Wuhan, China. By January, it had spread through China and jumped to Europe. By the end of February, it was in Oregon. In December, Antarctica became the last continent to report cases.

The virus changed life immediately. In late winter, officials talked in terms of weeks or months. Trump said it would disappear by April. Some scientists said it would die off when the weather turned warmer in the summer, much as the seasonal flu did each year. It's now spreading faster than at any time during the crisis. A new, more easily spread variation appeared in Britain and by year's end was reported in California and Colorado.

Oregon's disaster planning



Marion County Sheriff's Office/Oregon Capital Insider

Highway 22 East of Salem was shut down in both directions at mile post 13 for search and rescue efforts in the Santiam Canyon area on Sept. 9.

was built around a 9.0 earthquake on the Cascadia Subduction Zone off the coast of Oregon that would send tidal waves to decimate the coastal cities, while much of the area west of the Cascades would be heavily damaged.

But instead of a cataclysmic event that would be over in minutes but take the state months to recover from, 2020 brought an undulating long-term disaster in COVID-19.

By March, the theaters were closed. No sports events. No concerts. Eventually, no travel and no visitors — if possible. Schools were closed, with learning going online to mixed results. The initial outbreak hopped around the state, only to eventually settle into a community-spread pattern that left no corner of the state untouched. The stay-at-home order by Brown seemed to work, with Oregon "bending the curve" on infection rates to the point that a phased reopening was rolled out.

By July, the curve was bending back up, only to head down again in August. The infection rate bottomed out on a day usually associated with another time Americans were unexpectedly killed: Sept. 11, the date of the 2001 terrorist attacks that killed about 3,000 people. But an ominous new phase began as fall approached, a steep rise in cases that only now is showing some

initial signs of slowing. In December, COVID-19 was killing the equivalent of the 9/11 attack nearly every day in the U.S.

The nature of the United States of America is that much of the decision-making on handling the pandemic was decided by states, who took markedly different approaches. Oregon had some of the most restrictive rules, while neighboring Idaho had some of the least. Oregon's approach has resulted in the fourth lowest infection rate per capita of the 50 states.

But in a sharply politically divided nation, the virus became a political litmus test. Trump at first dismissed COVID-19 as a blip of illnesses. Even when the pandemic swept across the nation, Trump did not follow health experts recommendations to wear a mask and maintain physical distance from others. Many of his supporters did the same, refusing to wear masks and opposing closing businesses and other restrictions.

Trump was infected and spent a weekend in the hospital, receiving aggressive treatment with medicines available to only a handful of people. Within three days, he was out of the hospital.

Trump critics who hoped his serious brush with the virus would temper his refuse-nik attitude toward masks, so-

cial distancing and lockdown were quickly disappointed. Returning from the hospital, Trump went to a balcony in the White House and dramatically took off his mask. He appeared in a video telling Americans not to let the virus dominate their lives. He opposed vote-by-mail, a stance that led to voters standing in long lines on election day in some states hardest hit by the pandemic.

Trump's doubts fed and echoed feelings among a large swath of Americans who felt the cure was worse than the disease. Oregon's relative success in limiting the infection rate of the virus came with a cost. The on-and-off shutdowns of businesses and activities to control spikes of COVID-19 crippled small businesses while an estimated 400,000 lost their jobs.

While the employment situation improved in the second half of the year, it is showing signs of another downturn as federal aid cuts have more employers shedding workers. The state's antique Employment Department computer system couldn't keep up, leaving jobless Oregonians without benefits for more than eight months. The department is still playing catch-up on the avalanche of claims.

It's been 10 months since the virus appeared in Oregon and there is widespread "quarantine fatigue." For some, that means stretching the boundaries of their isolation to include more visits with friends and family. A more strident form has individual businesses and sometimes whole cities or counties saying they won't obey the rules anymore.

Protests of COVID-19 restrictions have grown and combined with Trump's unsubstantiated claims of fraud in the election of Joe Biden to fuel increasingly aggressive demonstrations. The Capitol in Salem has been closed during the pandemic, leading to protests in the plaza outside that at times have required police response. But the events took an especially aggressive turn on Dec. 21 during the Legislature's special session. Protestors tried to force

their way into the Capitol to demand to be allowed into the galleries of the House and Senate. State and local police in riot gear were able to stop the advance just inside a side door that led to the rotunda. A few protestors then smashed some of the glass doors at the entrance.

Even news of the possible end of the pandemic turned sour. Two vaccines were released in December. Health workers and elderly people in long term care facilities started receiving the first of a two-shot inoculation. Oregon has given first shots to about 40,000 people. But logistical bottlenecks being experienced by many states has Oregon well below its original goal of having given 100,000 first shots by the end of 2020. At the current pace, Polls show that 70% of the approximately 250 million adult Americans want to be vaccinated. But at the current rate, most won't have their turn to get the needle until summer, or perhaps even autumn.

Meanwhile, the virus remains. The third wave of virus is setting records for infections and deaths, with a further spike caused by Christmas

season travel unknown until mid-January. Oregon has one of the lowest number of intensive care unit beds per capita in the United States. Some regions have sporadically reported having no ICU beds available on a given day.

Most people on the planet are glad that 2020 is over. But the calendar is a creation of humans. Time flows past artificial breaks of days, months and years. The vaccine's arrival in less than a year was incredible news. But the overall flow of good or bad still leans to the latter. Pessimists know that those who have repeatedly thought throughout 2020 that things couldn't get worse have been proven repeatedly wrong.

Several cities in Oregon have announced an open rebellion against closures of restaurants and shops. The new Congress and new Legislature will face daunting tasks, not the least of which is to figure out how to meet without infecting everyone with COVID-19.

So, welcome 2021. It should be easy to improve on your predecessor. But we'll all wait for the proof.

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Challenges

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Those discussions are particularly important in a community where the vast majority of the population — 94.1% in Deschutes County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau — is white, said Jager, now a senior at Bend High.

"We're aren't seeing as much blatant racism here, so people aren't really aware of it happening," she said.

Some members of Bend 4 BLM, like Summit High School student Jace Bracelin, believe the group symbolizes Central Oregon's recent leftward political shift.

"I think there's definitely a cultural change happening in Deschutes County, in Bend," Bracelin, 17, said. "I think we are a symptom of that."

This past summer, separate from participating in numerous police brutality protests, the group organized a rally at the steps of the Bend-La Pine

Schools administrative building in downtown Bend. At the event, Bend 4 BLM members and other local students and activists, mostly people of color, asked the school district for more inclusive curriculum and teaching practices.

Bend 4 BLM being comprised mainly of current Bend-La Pine students gives the group a unique perspective on education, Bracelin said.

"I believe the students in America hadn't had the opportunity to speak out about their experience," he said.

This winter, the group turned its attention to a winter clothes drive with the Bethlehem Inn, along with researching and sharing statistics on racism and discrimination, Jager and Bracelin said.

But just because Bend 4 BLM isn't marching through downtown Bend this winter doesn't mean the group's fight against racism is over, Jager said.

"Just because it's not as much

in the news anymore, doesn't mean it isn't still going on," she said. "We can't forget to com-

bat racism."

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