

County approves \$125K funding for emergency operations center

Center hiring full-time staff for multiple functions

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Emergency Operations Center will receive \$125,060 in funding for its coronavirus response team to hire additional staff members and purchase supplies, including COVID-19 test kits.

Emergency Management Coordinator Dave Dobler requested staff from the county with specialized skills. This included Ryan Palmer from the Road Department to the position of Planning Section Chief.

Additionally, Dobler asked that County Commissioners Sam Palmer and Jim Hamsher increase the amount of hours they work at the EOC. Palmer serves as the public information officer while Hamsher serves as the court liaison.

Dobler, who hired four new staff members in the finance department of the EOC at \$16 per hour, said he needed four more staff members in that department to track expenses for Federal Emergency Management Agency reimbursements. County Judge Scott Myers said the EOC needs to give those duties to furloughed



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

From left, County Commissioner Sam Palmer, County Judge Scott Myers and Commissioner Jim Hamsher at Wednesday's Grant County Court session.

county staff in lieu of hiring additional staff.

Dobler said he also needs to hire two full-time section chiefs at \$24 per hour.

Hamsher asked Dobler to give a "Reader's Digest" run-down of who is on the medical team of the EOC.

Dobler said in the medical PIO positions, he has Jessica Winegar and John Combs from the Grant County Health Department. Dobler said in the Medical Work Group, he has Community Counseling Solutions CEO and County Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay, and from the Red Cross, he has Jim Spell.

The medical safety officer is Marsha Pereira, from Blue Mountain Hospital District's Home Health. Dobler said Blue Mountain Hospital CEO Derek Daly is also involved.

Palmer said there are mental health specialists as well on the medical team, includ-

ing staff from Step Forward, an individual needs agency in downtown John Day.

Dobler said he is working with the medical team to find other sources for testing kits and that he passed along information for a company in Texas that can do both testing for the virus and testing for virus antibodies, which is testing for people who have previously had the virus.

Dobler said he is working on getting more personal protective equipment to the county. He ordered 395 masks and 50 face shields for nine agencies and approximately 100 volunteer firefighters.

He said the state department of corrections is generating homemade masks. He added there is now a standardized pattern that will catch droplets.

Logistics Section Chief Steve Fletcher walked the county through the EOC's website, gc-or-covid-19.

info.

Fletcher said the website includes links to the Small Business Administration, unemployment and other resources.

"Community Counseling Solutions and the Health Department is aware of the website, and there are links to their websites, and they give us daily updates for the site," Fletcher said.

There are also links to the Oregon Health Authority, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state COVID-19 response website.

Fletcher said the EOC operates a call center from 8 to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays at 541-575-0520.

Dobler said there is a retired nurse on hand, Pereira, who can take basic medical questions while more involved medical questions get referred to the health department or hospital.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

DeeDee Kluser, the general manager of Oregon Telephone Corporation, said OTC Connections has not experienced internet slow down or people getting kicked off the server since the rise in internet usage.

Internet providers tackle the spike in demand for connectivity

Kluser: 'Ortelco was prepared for this when we didn't even know it was coming'

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The "stay home" order created a rise in internet use due to people working at home, playing video games, streaming the latest shows and more, but local internet providers say their services are running as intended.

Oregon Telephone Corporation General Manager DeeDee Kluser said OTC Connections has not experienced an internet slow down or people getting kicked off the server, thanks to a big enough backbone in the community that can support the demand.

"We constantly monitor our usage every day, and we have all different kinds of graphs that show us where we're at," Kluser said. "Because we have redundant routes, we can load balance, we can shift traffic or we can call a provider and get more if we need to ... We are prepared to add capacity as necessary."

OTC works have seen an uptick in complaints from parents stating their connection is slower than usual. Kluser said, with more people home and more devices connected to the network, household internet speeds can slow.

OTC can check the connection and see the usage and how many devices are connected to the router. Families with 15 megabit per second connection plans would usually be fine before the stay-at-home order, she said, but with more devices connected at the same time, they compete for limited bandwidth.

"Some parents are concerned and say, 'Well, we work from home now, and it seems like our internet is terribly slow,'" Kluser said. "We (OTC) get on and then tell them 'Well, you've got an Xbox, four iPads, three phones and two laptops connected, so probably that 15 mbps connection isn't enough under these circumstances.'" If customers are not

interested in increasing their bandwidth, adjustments can be made at home to accommodate the increase in use. Monitoring and turning off devices such as game consoles, which are the top devices for taking bandwidth, and planning on how to best use the available bandwidth can help minimize slowdowns at home.

"As a rule of thumb, we say that each device takes about 5 megabits of capacity so we use simple math like that to help customers make changes," Kluser said. "We have worked with a lot of folks this week and explained that everybody is going to need to make choices for their home."

Kluser said every connection is unique to the home so a neighbor's usage would not affect a personal connection. An overall network slowdown would occur if OTC did not have the capacity to meet the demand.

"OTC was prepared for this when we didn't even know it was coming," Kluser said. "We had a robust backbone, and we were prepared to take on people who wanted the increased bandwidth, but we never dreamed that it would be because of a COVID-19 situation."

CenturyLink has made adjustments regarding payments, according to Mark Molzen, a CenturyLink spokesman.

"In light of COVID-19, we have suspended our data usage limits on consumer and small business services. We will waive late fees and will not terminate service to these customers through May 12, 2020," said Molzen.

Molzen also said the CenturyLink network is performing at its normal high standard, and even with the rise, the demand is being met.

"With the increased demand for connectivity, collaboration and content, the CenturyLink network is running at its normal high standard," said Molzen.

Blue Mountain Digital Office Manager Tammy McKenna said there have been no complaints at the moment and that their service has been running like normal.

Persistent faith amidst trials and tribulations

'Church doesn't stop when the building is closed'

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County churches have seen empty pews and a new way to conduct Sunday services as the stay-at-home order is in effect to flatten the curve of the new coronavirus pandemic.

However, churches move forward in faith as they make adjustments and continue with optimism for the future.

Churches around Grant County have had to close their doors, but internet and telephone access has helped services continue from homes.

Pastor Randy Johnson from the John Day Church of the Nazarene said that their members have been using phone calls to continue their Bible study, accompanied with RightNow Media, which is a website the pastor encourages members to use that provides videos for Bible studies.

Since members can't get together on Sundays, Johnson said the church has been using Facebook Live to carry out services. A downside with a focus on technology has been the limited interactions with people not communicating in person.

"Sure, you can talk to people over the phone or even on the computer, but you don't really get to see them face to face," Johnson said. "There's a connection missing."

Pastor Keith DeHart from the Prairie Baptist Church said their services are also broadcasted on Facebook Live but agreed that conveying messages through a screen can be tough.

"This is such a relational thing where close contact is important to us, and trying to do that through a video screen or on the phone is a little different," said DeHart. "But we do feel very blessed



Contributed photo

St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church served pasta March 24 through March 31.

to have the opportunity to stay connected and be able to see each other because this was not possible 100 years ago when the Spanish Flu was around."

Father Christie Tissera from the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church said that Mass has been put on hold, but the church is still open for visitors to visit the chapel for a prayer.

As worship and services become home-centered, people continue to work together to bring hope for each other and provide services and help to the public.

Bishop David Archibald from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints said the women in the church have been working on sewing face masks, from designs approved by the hospital.

"Quite a few women have been putting masks together and collecting them for the hospital," said Archibald. "We would love to have anybody else to support this project, and we love to have our members participate in any type of other service projects that community members participate in that helps us get through this tough time."

St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church served pasta March 24 through March 31. Tissera said this carried out the mission of St. Elizabeth, which was to help the poor,

the lonely, the sick and the needy.

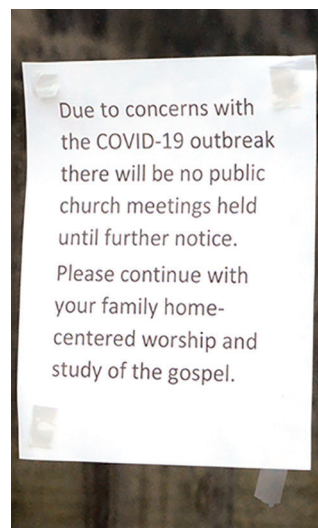
Keith and DeHart said church members have helped at the food banks as the amount of people going has risen.

"As far as us as a church goes, I would like the community to know that the church doesn't stop because the building is closed," said DeHart. "The church is not an organization like you think of like a business. It's a group of people that are following Jesus and caring about the community."

Along with helping in the community, each church leader shared that their members work hard at keeping in touch with each other and making calls to make sure members are fine.

Even with the uncertain future of COVID-19 in the world, church leaders shared their optimism for now and said they continue to exercise faith for the future.

Archibald said that mem-



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Doors to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are closed as Sunday services have become home-oriented.

bers of the Church of Jesus Christ were invited by Russel M. Neilson, president of the church, to participate in a worldwide fast on the last weekend of March to pray for help through the pandemic and for mental, economic and health relief.

Church members at the John Day Church of the Nazarene also designated every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. to pray for the community.

"This is a time to help one another, and at this time, some people are living in fear and are scared of the situation," said Tissera. "We need to help people to have hope that everything has not ended, and we need to help people not to give up: continue. We have a future, but we have to face this situation that is hard. However, remember God is there with you."

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