

A DRIVE-BY BIRTHDAY

A caravan of well wishes for Grant Union senior Taylor Allen

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County's soon-to-be graduates are facing stunning losses as once-in-a-lifetime events such as graduations, proms and spring sports have been upended by the coronavirus.

Taylor Allen, a senior, who turned 18 April 12, will miss out on rites of passage and end-of-year celebrations, including her final year of softball, prom and a party for her 18th birthday. Her mother, Marissa Williams, however, was determined not to let a global pandemic keep her from celebrating her daughter's 18th birthday with family, friends and the community.

Enter the coronavirus caravan.

Easter Sunday, Williams, husband Zach Williams, son Jhett, daughter Drewsey and Allen pulled into the Seventh Street Complex. Minutes later, Allen's eyes widened. Her face lit up in surprise as a line of 26 cars, trucks, and jeeps with banners and homemade signs turned into the complex to celebrate Allen's 18th birthday.

Friends, family, coaches, teachers and well-wishers



Chris Cronin, left, drops off a birthday gift for Taylor Allen at the Seventh Street Complex April 12. Allen's mother Marissa Williams texted family and friends to loop through the parking lot to wish Allen a happy birthday.

looped around the complex parking lot multiple times blaring car horns. Friends made homemade signs that read "Happy Birthday Tate, I love you" and dropped off gift bags, cards and cake. Another friend, Billy Holliday, dropped off a homemade decorated jar filled with the hand-written memories of Allen's closest friends with the inscription "to always make you smile."

Williams said she texted family and friends of Allen's the night before to wish her happy birthday by looping through the parking lot and that Allen was completely surprised.

"Taylor didn't have any idea we were doing this, and as the cars started coming down the road, she was teary-

eyed. It was moving to see so many people there to support her," Williams said.

Williams said the stay-at-home order and school closure has been hard for Allen as a senior.

"She didn't realize the last time she walked out of GU many Thursdays ago, that it would be her last," Williams said.

Williams said her family held out hope that after the first few weeks that the efforts to contain the virus would have been sufficient enough for life to get back to some normalcy.

Williams said, while she was not surprised by the orders from Gov. Brown to move classes online and close the schools, she was still hold-

ing out hope for Allen.

"We weren't surprised with the announcement, but we were trying to be optimistic for Taylor," she said.

Allen, who signed with Mt. Hood Community College to play softball in the fall, is hopeful she will get the chance to compete in a couple of softball tournaments with Grant Union to have some sort of a senior year with her high school team.

"I think it's important to realize that there's a bigger problem occurring in the world, and if missing those (senior year milestones) means saving lives, then it's worth it," Allen said in an email.

Williams said, as a family, they are strict about the stay-



Taylor Allen at the Seventh Street Complex April 12 as 26 cars and trucks drive through the parking lot to wish the senior a happy 18th birthday.



Taylor Allen, right, and her sister Drewsey sit on the tailgate of a truck at Seventh Street Complex April 12 after a caravan of friends, family, coaches and teammates circled the parking lot to wish her a happy 18th birthday.

at-home orders and, at times, the isolation can be difficult for the three kids, but she and her husband keep the kids active, so they are not going absolutely "bonkers" at home.

"It has been a big adjustment for all of us. We miss seeing our family and friends

and being at Seventh Street playing ball or going to softball games on the weekends, but we have spent a lot of quality time with our kids," Williams said. "It is a small blessing I get with my senior daughter, a little extra time before she leaves for college."

County health officials concerned about the drop in routine care visits

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Routine care visits have plummeted at Blue Mountain Hospital and Grant County Health Department amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Grant County Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay said patient visits have dropped by 24% in recent weeks. Blue Mountain Hospital District CEO Derek Daley said patients have declined in volume between 40% to 60% in a month, which mirrors the rest of the state.

Dr. Raffaella Betza, chief of staff at BMHD, said the drop in patient volume is mostly due to Gov. Kate Brown's March 17 order to postpone elective surgeries and non-urgent procedures until June 15 to free up capacity and conserve personal protective equipment for treating coronavirus patients.

Betza said, while the hospital continues to push out elective surgeries and procedures, they have encouraged patients to call their health care provider instead of going into the

hospital or urgent care settings.

Both BMH and the health department have encouraged patients to shift to telemedicine, which both facilities adopted long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the passage of the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act in Congress last month, Medicare now allows patients to engage in telehealth visits from any setting, whereas before appointments were required to be done from a medical facility.

Last month the state followed suit as well when the Oregon Health Authority, which oversees Medicaid, loosened telehealth regulations in response to COVID-19. OHA ordered insurers, including coordinated care organizations that administer Medicaid, to support telehealth options on all platforms, which includes



Derek Daley



Dr. Raffaella Betza, chief of staff for Blue Mountain Hospital District.

video, audio, email and text, and reimburse the insurance claims.

Lindsay said that older patients still prefer face-to-face visits.

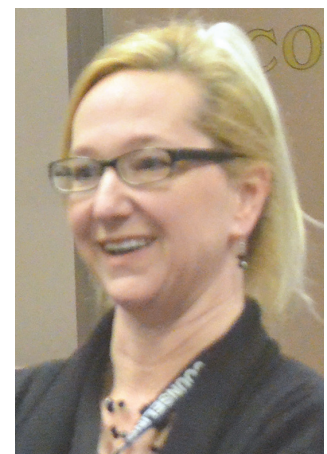
Betza said she still encourages patients, even those who are opposed to telehealth visits, to call their health care provider to discuss their options.

Lindsay said they are concerned about the health of the community and want people to know that they are still open.

While emergency care, vital surgeries and family

planning are exempt from the state order, Brown's directive meant that most rural hospitals would be without their primary sources of income until at least June 15.

Meanwhile, with one positive COVID-19 case in Grant County, the health department and the hospital have sat relatively empty, and revenue has



Kimberly Lindsay, Community Counseling Solutions CEO, updates the County Court March 11.

begun to dry up.

Hospitals statewide are hemorrhaging cash due to declining demand for care, even as the virus continues to spread.

Mark Owens, the state representative representing Grant

County, said he signed on with a bipartisan coalition of legislators in support of funding for rural hospitals.

"Allowing rural hospitals to be forced to close during a pandemic would be a travesty," Owens said. "These hospitals have limited revenue coming in due to the ban on non-emergency surgeries and procedures, and many have not seen the influx of COVID-19 patients they were told to prepare for."

Lindsay said the health department secured a loan through the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program. The program provides forgivable loans if the funds are used to keep employees on the payroll.

Daley said an eligibility determination has not been made for rural hospitals.

"The SBA's PPP would be helpful," Daley said.

2020 Family Fun Day and the Grant County Family Health Fair

Scheduled for June 13th
at Grant County Fairgrounds

Arts, Crafts & Activity Booths
and Hotdogs
nocones
ESSENTIALS: Tai Chi
SCREENS: Hearing (small charge), Dermatology, Vision

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and the health of our
community

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