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A distant Mother's Day

With senior homes locked down, families forced to stay away on holiday

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Mother's Day is coming up on Sunday, but with the coronavirus pandemic, the holiday will look much different this year.

As senior homes across the country continue to stay shuttered to visitors, Valley View Assisted Living will hold a Mother's Day "doorway" tea and bingo social for its 26 residents, 20 of them being mothers.

Stephanie Rodriguez, executive director at Valley View, said the residents, instead of gathering together

in a group for tea and bingo, sit in their doorways to socialize.

"They really like it," she said. "It is a great way for them to socialize, but still maintain appropriate social distancing."

Rodriguez said the doorway concept is used for exercises and games as well.

But the restrictions from seeing loved ones on Mother's Day are hard on everyone.

"I think any time you're restricted from seeing a loved one is difficult, especially during a holiday like Mother's Day," Rodriguez said.

Nancy Burns, whose mother Shirley Mulcahy has been at Valley View for nearly three years, said having her mother at an assisted living facility is very difficult right



Contributed photo

Shirley Mulcahy

now.

"I have a fear that she'll pass during this time, and I won't be there," Burns said.

Burns said Mulcahy, who has dementia and will turn 89 this

month, had just gotten through a flu scare in November before the outbreak of COVID-19.

In Oregon's reporting data, deaths in long-term care facilities account for over 50% of all COVID-19 deaths. Residents of nursing homes tend to have underlying health conditions, live in close contact with others and rely on person-to-person interactions.

Many people have seen their lives dramatically change and are coping the best they can.

But for people like Burns' mother, her cognitive health depends heavily on social engagement. Studies have shown activities such as regular bonding with loved ones, learning new skills and interacting with friends can slow the

progression of memory loss.

"She's losing her words again," Burns said.

Burns said, while some people visit their family members through the apartment windows at Valley View, she decided that would confuse her mother and have unintended consequences.

Despite the difficulties, Burns said there are positive things to remember as well.

Just before the outbreak, Burns said she brought in music tapes for her mother to listen to, and that has helped. The tapes are of an artist who used to work with the Beach Boys that bring back a lot of good memories for her mother.

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Senior pictures on display on the entrance fence to the Don L. Parker Memorial Field, where Prairie City School's graduation ceremony is planned once approved by the Grant County Emergency Operations Center.

DRIVE-IN DIPLOMAS

GRANT COUNTY SCHOOLS PLAN ALTERNATIVE GRADUATION CEREMONIES AMID COVID-19

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

COVID-19 presents challenges for graduation ceremonies, but schools in Grant County are developing ways to recognize the seniors safely.

Grant Union High School's graduation ceremony will be "drive-in style" at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 30. Parents and graduates will park in the Grant Union parking lot with one vehicle permitted for each graduate.

"They'll come in, and we'll have the stage set up out here on the front yards in front of the 'G' that's on the new gym," Grant Union Junior-Senior High School Principal Ryan Gerry said. "We'll have our stage set up out that way, and then

have a sound system spread out through the parking lot."

Gerry said some aspects of the ceremony will have to be modified to accommodate for social distancing, but there will be a presentation and valedictorian speeches while graduates are in cars.

Gerry said the school has been working with the Grant County Emergency Operations Center and concluded that a student can leave their vehicle, one at a time, to get their diploma from the stage with no hand off or handshake.

The school also hired a photographer who will take pictures of the graduates to make sure every family has a photo so parents won't have to get out

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The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Senior pictures on display on the entrance fence to the Don L. Parker Memorial Field.

Eastern Oregon counties developing plans to reopen economy

Gov. Brown: Plans could be approved this week for reopening no sooner than May 15

By Ellen Morris Bishop
EO Media Group

Grant County officials submitted a draft plan to reopen businesses to the state of Oregon for approval Monday, but other counties that have submitted plans have been told reopening won't happen before May 15.

The plan may or may not need to be modified based on future guidance and requirements from the state of Oregon.

The Grant County Emergency Operations Center was scheduled to host a videoconference meeting with local businesses discussing the plan Tuesday, May 5, past press time. Videos of that meeting and a meeting with the medical sector were planned to be uploaded to the county's new COVID-19 website, grantcountycovid.com.

"Several counties have already sub-



EO Media Group/Ellen Morris Bishop

Wallowa County Commissioners Susan Roberts and John Hillock participate with other rural counties in an internet meeting with Oregon Gov. Kate Brown May 1.

mitted plans to reopen with the state ...," said Stephanie LeQueu, Grant County's Oregon RAIN rural venture catalyst, in an email announcing the meetings. "These counties will

need to resubmit their plans because of multiple new requirements released in the last 72 hours, along with other requirements shared by the governor on Friday."

District Attorney Jim Carpenter said in a statement Monday that "no individual or business owner within Grant County that is open and demonstrating reasonable precautions to protect those they come in contact with and serve will be prosecuted for defying orders to shelter in place or remain closed."

On Friday, Wallowa County applied to open select businesses under Oregon's Phase 1 guidelines as early as May 4, but Gov. Kate Brown said, if the plan is approved, reopening won't occur until at least May 15.

The application details how businesses targeted for Phase 1 opening can meet the guidelines. Those businesses include restaurants, bars, child care, retail, outfitters and outdoor recreation. It also includes specifics on how hospitals will deal with surges, assurances that care providers will have a 14-day stock of personal protective equipment on hand at all times.

At this point, it seems that Wallowa County can check all the boxes to qual-

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