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QUARANTINE LEAN

Uptick in COVID-19 cases causes local staffing shortages



A line of customers piled up Friday at Chester's Thriftway. Roughly 15 employees were put on quarantine as COVID-19 cases doubled in Grant County in less than a week.

The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

"IT'S OUR JOB TO FEED THE COUNTY, AND IF EVERYONE ISN'T HERE THEN WE'RE IN TROUBLE."

—Bill Wyllie, Chester's Thriftway operations manager

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The rapid spike in COVID-19 cases has strained a fast food restaurant and grocery store in Grant County. In the days following Halloween, roughly 15 Chester's Thriftway employees were advised to quarantine for 14 days by contact tracers after coming into close contact with someone who contracted the coronavirus, according to Chester's Operations Manager Bill Wyllie.



Bill Wyllie

Wyllie said he has kept in touch with most people in quarantine and had not heard that any of them tested positive themselves. However, the lack of personnel has led the business to close at 8 p.m.

"It's our job to feed the county," he said, "and if everyone isn't here, then we're in trouble."

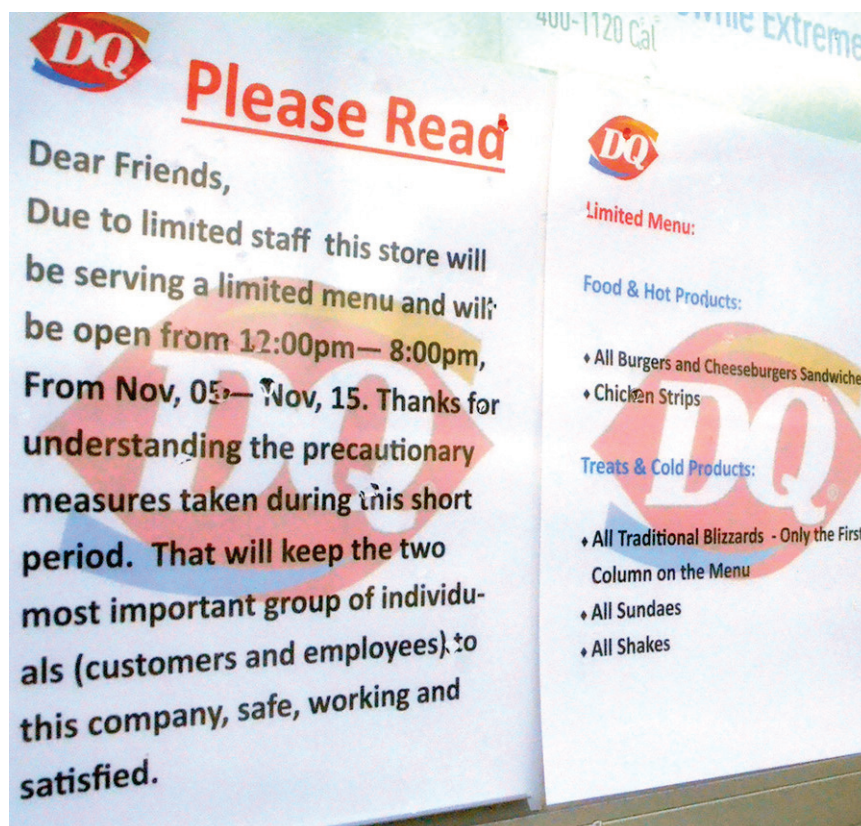
State health officials said workplace outbreaks are a significant driver in the recent spike in cases.

Oregon Health Authority's weekly COVID-19 report published Nov. 12 reported 45 deaths and 9,226 cases associated with all workplace outbreaks.

Wyllie told the Eagle that, through a government program, Chester's will pay the employees for the two weeks that they are out due to quarantine and can get reimbursed through a tax credit.

Essentially, Wyllie said, the employee submits a form from

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The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

A sign at Dairy Queen in John Day informs customers of both the limited staff and menu.

Takeout or leave it

Local restaurant owners react to statewide two-week freeze prohibiting dining in

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Local restaurants in Grant County expressed concerns and hopes for the future as Oregon enters a two-week freeze on many activities.

Gov. Kate Brown announced the two-week freeze on Nov. 13, which will place limitations on many businesses.

The freeze, which is scheduled for Nov. 18 to Dec. 2, will restrict restaurants and bars to only serving takeout.

Shannon Adair, owner of 1188 Brewing Company in John Day, said, while this is frustrating, it was expected with the rise of COVID-19 cases and more activities taking place indoors.

"I hope it's just two weeks, but it's going to surprise me if it's only two weeks," Adair said.

During the statewide shutdown that began in the spring, 1188 closed its doors along with many other businesses and did not provide takeout at the time.

Adair said they didn't provide takeout because they were not prepared to provide the option and the local area hadn't focused too much on take out prior the first shutdown.

Adair said 1188 made changes through the summer with a new program at the pub that provided customers an option to order online through their website or by using the Toast Takeout App. The community has also gotten more used to using the take-out option at restaurants since the first shutdown.

"I think we're in a better position to at least try it," Adair said about takeout this time around. "If we get to a point to where we're spending more money than what we're bringing in, then we'll close until we can open."

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STATEWIDE RESTRICTIONS

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced a two-week freeze on many activities from Nov. 18 to Dec. 2.

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Colson named Grant County School Employee of the Year

Prairie City math teacher, athletic director and senior project coordinator honored

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Prairie City School math teacher, athletic director and senior project coordinator Billy Colson received the 2020 Grant County School Employee of the Year award.

Colson got the award during an assembly in the Prairie City gym on Oct. 26 in front of staff and students.

The 2020 Grant County School Employee of the Year was awarded based on letters of recommendations received from the staff at Prairie City School. The selection committee then chose Colson to be the recipient of the award.

"It was very nice, and it was gracious of people to think that way," Colson said. "I appreciate it."

Colson has taught at Prairie City School for 12 years and has many different responsibilities at the school, according to Prairie City Superintendent Casey Hallgarth.

Hallgarth said Colson's ability to build relationships with students and being firm but fair with those who might struggle in class creates a great balance.

Colson spends an abundant amount of time with seniors to help them build a plan for life after graduation, he said.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Billy Colson teaches math, is the athletic advisor and coordinates senior projects at Prairie City School. He was named the 2020 Grant County School Employee of the Year.

"That's where Billy and I are on the same page. We celebrate a plan and not just for students who want to go to a four-year school," Colson said. "What about the kid

that just wants to go into the workforce, or the military? We celebrate and plan for them all."

Hallgarth said planning with seniors has led to Col-

"IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING, HE'LL GO DEEP DOWN AND EXPLAIN IT TO YOU IN A WAY YOU CAN UNDERSTAND IT. HE'S REALLY FUN, AND YOU CAN TALK ABOUT OTHER STUFF WITH HIM."

—Austin Cates, a junior at Prairie City High School, on Prairie City School's Billy Colson

son having a great connection with students after graduation.

Colson said one of his goals is being involved with the school as much as he can while helping others.

"If people need assistance with something I try to help and try to have a personal relationship with students and staff here at school," Colson said.

He said, with the size of the school, it is easy to develop a personal connection with students and sometimes their families. If a student graduates and leaves, the connection continues with the family when he gets updates on how kids are doing after graduation.

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