

Gazette Times

County wrestles with COVID19 problems

More contact tracers needed, enforcing mandatory masks

By David Sykes

Morrow County needs more health department workers to deal with the coronavirus pandemic commissioners were told at their meeting last Wednesday. Contact tracers, who locate and talk with patients, assist in arranging for isolation and work to identify people who the patients have been in close contact with are especially needed. "Our public health department is looking at contact tracers," County Administrator Darrell Green told the commissioners. "Everyone is overwhelmed. They have been working consistently over 40 hours a week and weekends. They just cannot keep up. We are going to have to make a decision pretty quick," he emphasized.

Green says current health department staff are doing the contact tracing but with the added new cases they are becoming overwhelmed. "Right now we need at least one or two more people. We have schools opening and that is going to tap our resources. We have to figure out something now, not three months from now. There is no possible way to keep doing what we are doing," he told the commissioners. He said it takes time to do a contact trace on one patient which requires a trained person but not an RN to do the work. "It takes four hours to do one case. We have had around 40 cases in the past two weeks. If we averaged 20 per week that



Commissioners spent most of last Wednesday's meeting discussing coronavirus issues.

would mean, we need two tracers. If we had four, we think we would be closer to what we need," Green told the commissioners. However, according to a letter sent July 6 to the governor's office, "Morrow County currently has nine trained contact tracers, including three bilinguals, in excess of the OHA recommendation based on the population of Morrow County, and is contracting and training for an additional four for back-up within the following week." The letter also said that the county successfully identified, contacted and traced 96 percent of the new COVID-19 positive cases over the past seven- and 14-day periods.

Green explained that additional tracers could be available through temporary services, but he wants the county, not knowing how long the pandemic is going to last, to find a more permanent solution. "Right now we need at least one more person who is not just temp. Nobody can tell us how long this will last. Is it going to be one to two years? We can't handle that

with just temp workers," he said. "Getting somebody in place and trained takes time. We have school starting in six to eight weeks and that brings in a whole other dynamic," he pointed out. "Then you have regular flu season," he added.

The commission agreed and voted to authorize the county Coronavirus Emergency Response Team to hire additional staff to fill the void. There is currently a fulltime employee position open and budgeted for in the Health Department that could be converted to a tracer position.

Isolation of patients
In other COVID-19 business, the commissioners discussed what they would do if a patient required isolation but does not have a place to stay. Some options were to rent hotel rooms or recreational vehicles to put the people up while they quarantine. Commission Chair Melissa Lindsay said it is the county's responsibility to contract for a place for people to go if they can't go back home. She said some counties are renting RVs

Lori Roach takes over as chamber director

By Bobbi Gordon

Lori Roach began her new job as executive director of the Heppner Chamber on July 1, taking the place of Sheryll Bates who will be retiring. Bates will continue part-time until the end of the year to bring Roach up to speed on the business owners and citizens of Heppner.

Lori's main goal for the chamber is to help the members not only survive the difficulties, but to thrive in the midst of the turmoil facing the entire nation. Lori told the Gazette, "From the outside looking in, it



Lori Roach

seems like business owners in Heppner have weathered this storm fairly well, but I am looking forward to learning more about the needs my members have and figuring out what the chamber can do to help during this unique season."

"I think every executive director that takes on a chamber wants to see the chamber grow. I know the Heppner Chamber has really healthy numbers already and there is a lot of support from the community, but I'm still hoping to implement some special programs over the next several years that will make our chamber that much stronger," she continued.

"I love entrepreneurship and hope I can encourage people to take the plunge into starting their own brick and mortar business or online business. Times like this are the perfect time to start something new. The world has absolutely changed over the last few months; change brings opportunity for new ideas to take hold and grow, so I would like to encourage anyone that is thinking about starting a new business to stop in and let me brainstorm with them or help them figure out the next step to take when dealing with Oregon business startup requirements. If I don't have an answer to their questions, I'll find someone who does," she stated.

Lori attended school in Elgin from first grade through high school graduation. She attended Central Oregon Community College in Bend, then received her Bachelor of Science Business Administration degree for marketing, tourism, leadership and organization from Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. She was a member of the Elgin Chamber of Commerce, including serving as president and vice-president.

Lori's husband is Rick and their blended family includes nine children and 18 grandchildren. She lived throughout Oregon most of her adult life but most recently lived in North Bonneville, WA, which is just across the river from the Bridge of the Gods. She and Rick operated Studio 6 Designworks where they published The Gorge Business News newspaper that is distributed from Lyle to Camas in Washington and from Troutdale to The Dalles in Oregon.

"I started Studio 6 Designworks in 2016 to encompass many of my entrepreneurial passions. It is a creative marketing, publishing, photography and consulting business, none of which were in high demand a few months ago when Covid-19 arrived. When the opportunity came about for the executive director position, I knew it was just the right answer to our prayers at just the right time," Lori reported. Once the pandemic began, she started an online store with her artwork that can be found at www.rambling-wandererstore.com.

Roach said she is a photographer as well and will have a piece displayed for the Wild Landscapes exhibit at the Joseph Center in Joseph, OR between July 27 and Sept. 11. She noted that she loves many aspects of photography, but architectural photography is the bread and butter at this time.

"Rick and I had decided to also jump into wedding photography with both feet, well I guess that would be all four feet, this summer. We participated in the Wedding Professional Photography Association Conference in Las Vegas in February and acquired some great equipment. We were having a great time thinking about the prospect of having a busy summer taking wedding photos, when all of a sudden, our country was in the middle of a pandemic. Needless to say we shifted our thoughts and went in an entirely new direction," she said.

She continued, "We have been in Heppner since April and have really enjoyed meeting new friends and settling into the community and are more than willing to offer our photography services to anyone who may need personal, family, commercial or wedding photos. I'm hoping that some ranchers will let me come and take photos of their brandings next spring."

When asked about other jobs she has done she reported she created the newspaper Northeast Oregon Business News, which was in circulation from 2014 to 2017 and was distributed throughout Baker, Morrow, Umatilla, Gilliam, Union and Walla Walla Counties. She was also the executive director of the Umatilla Chamber in 2017, has owned a construction cleaning company, was a siding contractor and owned a manufacturing business in Elgin where Kimbel Trailers were built.

She said she enjoys writing, photography, hiking and spending time with her husband, children and grandchildren in her spare time and is looking forward to her new duties at the Heppner Chamber.

Lexington installs new welcome signs



Scott Lamb (left) and Will Lemmon installed the first 'Welcome to Lexington' sign at the corner of Highway 74 and A Street in Lexington. -Photo by Bobbi Gordon.

The Lexington Town Council recently purchased three signs to welcome travelers to the town. Signs will be placed at each end of town on Highway 74 and near Airport Road on Highway 207. Signs were designed by Mayor Juli

Kennedy and printed by High Performance Signs in Hermiston.

The first sign has already been installed by Scott Lamb, his wife Joanna and town councilor

Will Lemmon. Lamb plans to install the other two signs before July 15.

The purchase of the signs was made possible by a grant from Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG).

-See COUNTY COVID ISSUES/PAGE THREE

Advertisement for MORROW COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS INC. featuring rebates up to \$1000 and financing as low as 3.99% for 36 months. Includes a photo of a Polaris utility vehicle and contact information for Justin Bailey.