



HH file photo

A "Heroes Work Here" sign honors essential workers at Guardian Angel Homes in Hermiston in April. Deidre Torres hopes people will parade through town in support of social distancing rules that protect essential workers on May 30.

Essential workers organize counterprotest

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

When one group of Hermiston-area residents rallies on May 30 to protest restrictions put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, some essential workers those rules could help protect are planning to make their voices heard in counterprotest.

Deidre Torres is spearheading a demonstration she calls "Essential not Sacrificial" that will take place at noon on May 30, the same time as the "Hermiston Freedom Rally" protest downtown. Participants plan to meet in their vehicles in the Bi-Mart parking lot, displaying signs calling for a safe reopening plan, and drive through town in a socially distanced form of protest.

"We'll be following the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidelines to protect people, prevent exposure and keep everyone safe," she said.

Torres said she isn't against reopening businesses again in some form, but she objects to ideas

espoused by at least some organizers of Reopen Hermiston that businesses shouldn't be required to follow safety rules, such as wearing masks, and that mass gatherings should start again immediately.

"I'm not necessarily against reopening, I'm just against a complete, unilateral reopening without a

"I'M NOT NECESSARILY AGAINST REOPENING, I'M JUST AGAINST A COMPLETE, UNILATERAL REOPENING WITHOUT A SCIENCE-BASED PLAN."

— Deidre Torres, Hermiston resident

science-based plan," she said.

She said she just wants to make sure that local government officials know that not everyone agrees that everything should be opened up now. She said many essential workers she knows are also worried not only about getting the virus, but also spreading it to others who are more vulnerable.

"Everyone has made sacrifices," she said. "I'm not able to attend my little brother's graduation ceremony. I've been quarantining for two months. I haven't hugged my mother for two months."

Rebecca Wallace Corff, who is helping Torres organize the event, said hospital workers are often "gagged"

to get it, and you don't want your kids to get it." She said she hopes people will see the counterprotest and realize there is a "silent majority" that are in favor of practicing social distancing.

A Gallup poll published May 19 found that 54% of Americans were "very confident" social distancing measures saved lives, while 31% of respondents said they were "moderately confident."

Wallace Corff said she understands that when human beings are scared, they retreat to a place of denial as a way to handle their fears. But she said if people don't trust the government, she hopes they will trust doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who want everyone to be safe and healthy.

With dueling protests in Hermiston set for the same day, Essential not Sacrificial participants are encouraged to stay in their vehicles and not interact with protesters in either camp. A code of conduct for the event can be found on the Essential not Sacrificial Facebook page.



HH file photo

Umatilla County's third COVID-19 patient to die of the virus died at Good Shepherd Medical Center.

Third Umatilla County resident dies of COVID-19

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A third Umatilla County resident has died of COVID-19, Umatilla County Public Health announced Monday.

The patient was a 70-year-old woman, who tested positive on May 4 and died May 16 at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston. The health department reported she had underlying health conditions.

"We encourage everyone to be respectful as a family in our community grieves," the county stated.

As of Tuesday, May 19, Umatilla County reported 102 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and three presumptive cases where someone was showing symptoms after being close contact with a confirmed case.

Seventy-eight patients are considered recovered after not displaying symptoms for at least 72 hours. Of the 24 active cases remaining, one patient is currently in the hospital.

A total of 1,366 Umatilla County residents have been tested for COVID-19, according to the health department, with 1,263 tests coming back negative. A map of confirmed cases

last updated May 12 on the health department's website shows between 51 and 75 confirmed cases in the Hermiston ZIP code and 16 to 25 in Umatilla so far.

According to data compiled by Lane County Public Health, Umatilla County had the third highest COVID-19 rate per 100,000 population as of May 18, just behind Multnomah County.

The health department stated in its news release that as businesses reopen, everyone should keep in mind that COVID-19 is still circulating in the community, and take as many precautions as they can to slow its spread. Those precautions include everyone staying home when sick, people over the age of 60 or with underlying health conditions staying home even when well, staying at least 6 feet away from others and wearing a mask in public. They also include good personal hygiene, such as washing your hands frequently, not touching your face and sneezing or coughing into a tissue or your elbow.

Anyone in need of mental health services at this time can call Lifeways at 866-343-4473 to discuss what services are available.

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