

OSU completes door-to-door COVID-19 testing

Test results will take a week to 10 days

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston residents who participated in Oregon State University's COVID-19 study last weekend will wait seven to 10 days for the results of their test.

Researchers visited randomly selected homes in Hermiston on July 25-26 to offer free COVID-19 tests, which will be used to create an estimate of how widespread the virus is in Hermiston.

Umatilla County announced 132 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 between the afternoon of Friday, July 24, and the morning of Monday, July 27, but none of those came from the OSU study, known as TRACE COVID-19.

Jeff Bethel, an associate professor in OSU's College of Public Health and Human Sciences and co-director of the TRACE COVID-19 project, said samples collected from homes in Hermiston by OSU over the weekend are still being processed. Participants will receive their results in the mail seven to 10 days after they were tested, and can elect to get results by secure email as well.

"We're very thankful for the people that chose to par-



Photo contributed by Oregon State University
Researchers with Oregon State University prepare for door-to-door COVID-19 testing in Hermiston on July 25-26. Participants will receive their results in seven to 10 days.

tipate," Bethel said.

According to the Oregon Health Authority's weekly report released July 22, the Hermiston ZIP code has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per capita in the state, at 331.8 cases per 10,000 residents.

Nazario Rivera, a community health care worker in Hermiston who volunteered with TRACE COVID-19 over the weekend, said it has been worrisome to see Hermiston's cases continue to rise at such a high rate. He said he volunteered to go door to door with OSU field workers because he hopes that the study will provide useful information for the city and Umatilla County to help slow the spread of the

virus.

"I think this can be a really helpful tool," he said.

Rivera said the volume of negative comments on social media about the study had made him a little nervous about knocking on doors, but he ended up having a good experience.

"There were folks that did kindly decline, but at least with my team, nobody was rude," he said. "They just said, 'no thanks.'"

He said he was surprised that people would decline the free medical service, which could be a help to people who don't have health insurance in particular.

Bethel said community members like Nazario, who accompanied OSU team

members, provided "invaluable" knowledge of the area.

In Hermiston, the community was broken up into 30 neighborhoods. Teams visited each neighborhood and knocked on doors in a regular interval depending on the neighborhood's size — every fourth house in the area, for example, or every fifth.

Bethel said he didn't have specific numbers to release yet on participation levels in Hermiston, but he said researchers are confident they collected enough samples to produce good results for the study.

"It's voluntary," he said. "Some people say 'No thank you,' and that's fine, and other people are very excited



Photo contributed by Oregon State University
Researchers with Oregon State University's TRACE COVID-19 were in Hermiston over the weekend of July 25-26 to conduct door-to-door COVID-19 testing.

to participate, and that's happened in every community."

Most people being tested for COVID-19 are showing symptoms or are associated with a worksite outbreak, Bethel said, which can hide the true prevalence of the virus by missing people who are asymptomatic. By testing a random sampling of Hermiston residents, OSU researchers will be able to create a more accurate estimate of how widespread the virus is in Hermiston. Bethel said information generated by the TRACE project will help local health officials better address the outbreak, and help the individuals who receive their own test results.

"We can identify people who are unknowingly part of the transmission cycle, and stop that from happening," he said.

TRACE COVID-19 has previously conducted door-to-door testing in Corvallis, Bend and Newport. The team has returned for additional rounds of testing to measure continuing levels of the virus in those communities.

In Newport, for example, OSU announced that preliminary results suggested that 3.4% of the Newport community had the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 on June 20-21. A follow-up round suggested that about 0.6% of residents had the virus on July 11-12.

Bethel said those results were good news, but showed the virus is still active and people still need to take precautions, such as social distancing and wearing masks, to prevent another increase in cases.

City Council awards contract for library basement remodel

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Knerr Construction will complete a \$910,000 remodel of the Hermiston Public Library's basement, after the Hermiston City Council awarded the project to the Hermiston-based firm on Monday, July 27.

Once complete, the remodeled basement level will serve as temporary office space for city staff until the old city hall, damaged by a fire in December 2019, is repaired or replaced. After city staff move back out of the space, it will serve to expand the library's book collection and children's area.

City Manager Byron Smith said Knerr Construction came in \$15,000 under the estimates of Architects-West, which designed the remodel.

"We received five bids, which was a great turnout," he said.

The remodel includes moving the bathrooms and some offices and removing little-used study rooms to create a large, open space that in the future would be easy for a single library employee to supervise if the library's book collection and reading areas were expanded to the basement.

Smith said the cost also includes improvements to the HVAC system, and rebuilding the ramps and sidewalks around the back entrance as required to meet Americans With Disabilities standards.

On July 27, the council also voted to approve a deal with Umatilla County for the planned new city hall

on the site of the damaged city hall. The city plans to add about 5,000 square feet to the new city hall that are not currently needed for offices, but would be added with an eye toward future growth.

In exchange for using all or part of that space for up to 15 years, the county has agreed to give the city \$2.6 million in enterprise zone funds generated by Lamb Weston and the county's building at 435 E. Newport Ave., worth about \$400,000. Smith said the city tentatively plans to exchange the Newport Avenue building with the owner of the Lanham Building next to city hall, which is needed to give the city enough room for its new, larger city hall.

The county would also pay a monthly maintenance fee to help cover costs, such as utilities and janitorial. The fee would start out at 40 cents per square foot — which Smith said would work out to \$1,800 to \$2,000 a month — and increase to 80 cents by year 11.

Hermiston makes plans for CARES Act funds to aid city, businesses

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston City Council has approved a plan for more than \$500,000 in CARES Act funding that will soon be available for the city's use.

During their Monday, July 27 meeting, City Manager Byron Smith said the city will receive the federal stimulus money, aimed at assisting local governments that have lost revenue from the pandemic, on a reimbursement basis from the state.

"The state has reassured us they will expedite that as soon as possible," he said.

Smith said the city can start by being reimbursed for the \$16,000 it contributed to Umatilla County's spring grants for small local businesses that were shut down by the pandemic.

He said the city also expects to have spent about \$100,000 by the end of 2020 directly on COVID-19 expenses, such as paying overtime to cover for police officers and other city staff quarantining after close contact with a COVID-19 case.

The rest of the money the city plans to use as direct support to residents.

The city plans to put \$100,000 toward a water and sewer assistance program for residents who need help paying their bill after their employment was affected by the pandemic. Another \$25,000 will go toward a similar program to help residents pay electricity bills. Smith said that money will be added to the \$250,000 that Amazon Web Services recently donated to help Hermiston Energy Services and Umatilla Electric Cooperative customers keep up on their bills.

He said the city hopes to extend those programs beyond those with the lowest income, to include those who make "just enough" that they struggle to pay their bills but don't usually qualify for such assistance. He said the city can set its own parameters for which individuals and businesses can apply.

The city also plans to spend \$75,000 on assisting residents in need with rental or mortgage pay-

ments. For both the housing and utility assistance programs, he said the regional nonprofit CAPECO has said it can administer the funds on behalf of the city, as it already has similar programs set up and people are used to seeking help there.

The city plans to give \$40,000 to the Oregon Worker Relief Fund, which would direct that funding to Hermiston residents, such as undocumented immigrants, who don't qualify for other CARES Act assistance.

The plan approved July 27 also calls for another \$184,000 to be spent on assistance for local businesses that have seen reduced revenue during the pandemic.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he would like to see the money be available to businesses that already received some Paycheck Protection Program money, but are still struggling financially as the pandemic has lasted far longer than the federal grant covered.

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Dr. Dave Drotzmann and Dr. Kollan Arritt would like to welcome a new associate,

Dr. Stephanie Uggen

a graduate from Indiana University practicing full scope optometry, specializing in Pediatrics.

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