



BACK TO SQUARE ONE



Nelly's Super Tacos in Hermiston, above, has been takeout-only for most of 2020. Below, both times Broken Barrel was forced to switch to takeout-only led to decreased sales and staff reductions for the Stanfield bar and grill.

Umatilla County gets put back to a baseline shutdown over COVID-19

By JADE MCDOWELL
 NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County residents had been bracing for a possible return to Phase 1 reopening restrictions after the county's cases of COVID-19 per capita continued to outpace the rest of the state, but on Friday, July 31, the county got sent all the way back to the baseline "stay home" level first implemented in March.

The announcement from Gov. Kate Brown on the evening of Thursday, July 30, put Umatilla County back to baseline and Morrow County to Phase 1 as of noon the next day. Under baseline rules, eating establishments must return to takeout and delivery only, and businesses, such as salons and movie theaters, must close.

Martha McClusky, owner of Broken Barrel in Stanfield, said both times her bar and grill has had to switch to takeout only has meant a "dramatic decrease in sales," forcing her to reduce staff.

Like many restaurant owners, she said she would not have placed large orders for certain items if she had known the shutdown was coming. She said she is currently offering steep discounts on kegs so they don't go bad now that she can't serve the alcohol by the glass inside the bar.

She said she felt grateful for the community support in the spring and now, however.

"I wasn't hit so bad I couldn't stay afloat," she said.

As a thank you to loyal customers in the spring, Broken Barrel offered a free lunch for takeout one week, which turned into a weekly tradition once community members started making donations to fund the effort. McClusky said they plan to pick that back up again during the shutdown.

Some restaurants never completely reopened after they first closed their doors to diners in March.

Nelly's Super Tacos in Hermiston has been takeout-only for most of 2020.

Owner Nelly Sanchez said

she kept customers to the drive-thru window even after she was allowed to reopen the building because she would be "devastated" at the thought of a customer or employee getting sick at her restaurant. She said she also feared it would actually be worse for her business to go through the expense of reopening under all of the restrictions, only to have an outbreak or exposure force a closure.

"The reason I didn't open my doors is because I knew it would get worse, like it has," she said. "I saw other businesses open, and then people were getting sick and they had to close their doors for a week. If I get closed for a week that would kill me. I figure if I can do a little bit (of business) every day I will be OK."

She said having a drive-thru window does help some customers feel more comfortable picking up food, but they have also lost a lot of customers since the pandemic began.

The action to take Umatilla County to baseline and Morrow County back to Phase 1 was the first time Gov. Kate Brown has reversed a county's reopening — something she told counties was a possibility if their COVID-19 numbers indicated they had opened too fast.

In an interview with the Oregon Capital Bureau, which provides state-level coverage for the *Hermiston Herald's* parent company, Brown said for the past few weeks she and health officials made attempts to get Umatilla County to take voluntary actions. Union and Lincoln counties had voluntarily rolled back from Phase 2 to Phase 1 when they faced rising infection rates. The two counties were removed July 30 from the state's watchlist of counties where infections are rising beyond acceptable limits.

Brown had hoped to replicate the same pattern with Umatilla County, but said her overtures were repeatedly rebuffed. She said county commissioners would only follow statewide restrictions.

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BACK TO BASELINE

The following rules and guidelines are in place while Umatilla County is in baseline mode:

- Stay home as much as possible and limit nonessential travel
- Civic and faith-based gatherings, such as government meetings or church services, are capped at 25 people
- Social gatherings are limited to 10 people
- Restaurants and bars are limited to takeout and delivery
- Facilities that must close include gyms, playgrounds, pools, entertainment facilities, youth sports, spas, sports courts and personal care services, such as hair salons.

Door-to-door testing shows widespread cases

OSU study estimates 17% of Hermiston residents positive for COVID-19 on July 25-26

By JADE MCDOWELL
 NEWS EDITOR

Oregon State University researchers believe 17% of Hermiston residents were positive for COVID-19 during the university's door-to-door testing period on July 25-26.

According to the announcement on the morning of Friday, July 31, field workers from the TRACE COVID-19 study collected 471 samples from 249 randomly selected households across Hermiston on those dates. The news release noted that field workers knocked on more than those 249 doors, but only 44% of homes contacted agreed to participate in the free, voluntary test.

The study had previously announced it would take as many



Researchers with Oregon State University prepare for door-to-door COVID-19 testing in Hermiston on July 25-26.

Photo courtesy of Oregon State University

as 10 days for people to receive their results from the lab, but the tests were processed more quickly than expected.

The results suggest that about 3,000 people in the city were carrying the virus on July 25-26. Of those who tested positive, 80%

reported not having any symptoms.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara and Umatilla County Commissioner George

Murdock told the *East Oregonian* that the results showing wide community spread in Hermiston were a factor in the state's decision to bring the county back to "stay home" status on Friday — something Gov. Kate Brown confirmed.

Mayor David Drotzmann said in a statement that the results constituted a "significant warning" for Hermiston.

"We now have a clearer picture of how many people are carrying this disease without knowing it, and how rapidly it is spreading family to family, household to household," he said.

The TRACE team also tested for COVID-19 in samples of wastewater taken from Hermiston and Boardman's recycled water treatment plants, and reported that the levels of the virus in the sewage were "significantly higher" than anywhere else in the state that the team has tested.

The results of the study were made public the morning after Gov. Kate Brown announced that

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