

## Contractors open new business in Hermiston

HERMISTON HERALD

Cortes General Contractor LLC in Hermiston is now open for business.

Louis Cortes Jr. said the business he and his father Louis Cortes Sr. opened will focus on “roofing, siding, framing, decks, storage and more.”

He said right now they are working on building their offices, but people can currently reach them for a free estimate or information about the company by emailing [cortescontractor@icloud.com](mailto:cortescontractor@icloud.com) or calling 541-314-5149.

## Restaurants say \$55 million not enough to prevent closures

By JIM REDDEN  
OREGON CAPITAL BUREAU

Restaurant and other business organizations say the \$55 million promised by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown for pandemic relief is a good first step, but not nearly enough to prevent widespread closures caused by her temporary “freeze” to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Brown’s two-week statewide freeze on indoor and outdoor dining, indoor exercise and entertainment activities — and social gatherings of more than six unrelated people — took effect on Nov. 18. It will last for four weeks in Multnomah County, and Brown said it could be extended elsewhere, too.

The day before the freeze started, Brown’s office announced the federal CARES Act funds will be prioritized for businesses in the hospitality industry, those hurt by the freeze order, small businesses, and those from Black, Native American and other historically disadvantaged communities.

It will be distributed by the counties, which will each receive a base amount of \$500,000 plus more funds on a per capita basis to distribute.

“Our iconic main street businesses have sacrificed too much already in this pandemic,” Brown said.

Jason Brandt, president and CEO of the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, had previously called for the Oregon Legislature to create a \$75 million relief fund for businesses.

“Our industry applauds the decision by Gov. Brown to create a \$55 million relief fund with an emphasis on supporting hospitality businesses. The support represents a starting point for much needed federal action to assist

Oregon’s restaurants and hotels in fighting through the upcoming months,” he said.

Sandra McDonough, president and CEO of Oregon Business & Industry, opposed the freeze before it was announced but said OBI was happy to see the fund set up.

“We remain very concerned about the devastating impact the closures will have on small businesses across our state,” she said. “Many may not survive this latest blow. While this fund won’t offset all of the inevitable business losses, it will help many.”

“It’s a start,” said Katy Connors, chair of the Independent Restaurant Alliance of Oregon, “but it will not go a long way with all the debt that’s already been created by the crisis and the shutdown that are occurring.”

The alliance is pushing for a special session of the Oregon Legislature in December to provide more relief and to legalize the sale of cocktails to-go. On Wednesday, Speaker of the House Tina Kotek also called for a December special session of the Legislature.

Connors also said Brown’s ban on outdoor dining is especially unfortunate because many restaurant and bar owners recently have spent tens of thousands of dollars on tents, heaters and other equipment to cope with the wet weather. She noted that Washington Gov. Jay Inslee allowed outdoor dining to continue when he banned indoor dining last week.

Brandt, McDonough and Connors all said health experts agree that people not taking precautions at social gatherings are causing COVID-19 cases to spike in Oregon, not restaurants and bars.

# Club 24 gyms hand over management to stay open

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

As gyms and most other recreational facilities shut down under Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order for a two-week “freeze,” some Umatilla County gyms are taking unique steps to stay open.

Club 24, which owns locations in Hermiston and Pendleton, has notified members that during the shutdown it will be turning over control of its facilities to Tawtnuk Wellness Institute, which will operate the gyms as “wellness clinics.” Hermiston Athletic Club in Hermiston posted a similar message on its Facebook page.

The website for Tawtnuk Wellness Institute describes the institute as fulfilling “the holistic wellness of all communities by converting health clubs, gyms, and fitness centers to wellness facilities” and offers only two links, one to an intake form for Club 24 and one for Hermiston Athletic Club. It lists Orien Fiander, who has in the past described himself to the *Hermiston Herald* as the CEO of Club 24 and owner of Hermiston Athletic Club, as its owner and CEO.

According to information provided on the Club 24 website, members of its gyms in Oregon and Washington will be able to work out on-site during the shutdown if they bring a doctor’s note prescribing exercise or if they fill out an intake form for Tawtnuk Wellness Institute. Tawtnuk will conduct a temperature screening at the door, require sign-ins for contact tracing purposes, conduct “enhanced cleaning protocols” and require masks at all times. Some amenities, such as showers and saunas, will be closed.

“Overall, the look and feel should be close to what you are used to when it comes to Club 24 facilities with direct changes that will only make our facilities cleaner in order to allow you to keep improving your health,” an email to members stated.

The email also outlined the financial difficulties that Club 24 has faced this year, through shutdowns when Umatilla County was in baseline or Phase 1, and through people canceling their memberships.

“Cherished colleagues had to find new jobs because other businesses were able to be open when we were



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

The Club 24 location in Hermiston, as well as those in other parts of Oregon and Washington, is turning over control of their facility to Tawtnuk Wellness Institute, which will operate the gyms as “wellness clinics.”

not,” the email stated.

Those concerns echoed other complaints that gyms in Oregon have made during the latest shutdown. The *Statesman Journal* reported that Courthouse Club Fitness in Salem was staying open in defiance of the governor’s executive order, quoting a statement from owner John Miller that, “As a result of the harm done to our business from the first shutdown, we will not survive another closure.” The article stated other gyms in Salem had indicated they were also considering staying open.

Executive Order 20-65 by Gov. Kate Brown states that from Nov. 18 to Dec. 2 the state is implementing closures and restrictions on gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19 in light of hospitals “sounding the alarm” that they could be overwhelmed if cases continue on their current trend.

“The cycle of this virus is such that if we are seeing case rates topping 800-1,000 per day now, that means our hospitals are headed for very dark days ahead,” the exec-

utive order states. “Actions taken now will help prevent lives from being lost — not just from COVID-19, but also from other diseases or accidents that lead people to need hospital-level care, which they would not be able to get if hospital beds and hospital staff are fully occupied with COVID-19 patients.”

The order lists facilities that must close during the two-week freeze, including “gyms and fitness organizations,” but does not go into detail about the definition of a gym.

Club 24 did not answer an email and phone message left Nov. 18 asking for further clarification about how its facilities would qualify as something other than a gym under the governor’s orders.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration has conducted much of the enforcement on orders issued by Brown in regards to business operations during the pandemic. Spokesperson Aaron Corvin said in the case of Club 24, it would be hard to know exactly whether its current

operations are an OSHA violation without knowing more details about exactly how things are operating.

He said if someone makes a complaint about a business not following COVID-19 mandates, OSHA looks into the complaint. Sometimes they can work with the business owner to “satisfactorily” resolve the complaint without opening a formal enforcement process, he said, while other times the agency might end up issuing fines and other penalties.

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