

High school plans drive-thru graduation

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Astorian

While it takes effort to become a graduate, a school graduation ceremony is usually the easy part.

But as schools approach another June under the cloud of the coronavirus pandemic, some administrators are waiting to see what conditions — and Clatsop County’s case metrics — are like closer to the date before they lay concrete plans. Others anticipate graduation events similar to last year’s socially distanced, drive-thru ceremonies.

Seaside School District will replicate the drive-thru ceremony it held last year, complete with a parade down Broadway Street to a vehicle turnaround at the beach where graduates received their diplomas. The district will then hold a formal ceremony at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center parking lot.

“We know that is doable under any metrics that we

see,” said Jeff Roberts, the Seaside High School principal. Also, he added, the drive-thru event was “incredibly well-received by graduates last year.”

Students this year specifically requested it for their commencement ceremony.

Clatsop Community College recently announced it would hold a commencement ceremony at CMH Field in Astoria on June 18.

The field will also likely be the site of the Astoria High School graduation, Superintendent Craig Hoppes said, though he isn’t sure yet exactly what the ceremony will look like. He hopes it can be a bit more intimate than last year’s graduation, a drive-in ceremony where students and their families spent much of the time in their cars and at a great distance from each other.

Still, Hoppes expects some social distancing will still be necessary in June, too.

In other school districts, there have been preliminary discussions about

what graduation ceremonies might look like this year but nothing final.

The rural Jewell School District is considering different possible graduation ceremony scenarios for a June 19 event depending on the county’s risk level.

While specifics are still hazy, Principal Jon Wood said, “We are going to do something and it’s going to be more traditional than last year.”

The hope is to be back in the low-risk category again and have a “more normal” event, he said.

Last year, the graduation ceremony for Warrenton High School students required months of planning. In a normal year, the ceremony would not take nearly so much preparation: there would be a rehearsal the day before and then the actual event.

Fortunately, high school staff told The Astorian, they’ve gone through a pandemic graduation once and have a better idea now of what to do.

“Worst-case scenario



Seaside Signal

Seaside High School’s 2019-20 graduation festivities included a vehicle parade down Broadway, with students receiving their diplomas at the Turnaround and a ceremony in the public parking lot downtown.

is we do what we did last year,” said Josh Jannusch, the Warrenton High School principal. The pregraduation parade through downtown Warrenton and then the drive-thru ceremony were successful, he said, and well-received by families and students.

In Knappa, the high

school is looking at using, ideally, the gym — for a more traditional ceremony — or the high school football field — if capacity is an issue and case numbers are high. It is possible to livestream events at both locations, noted Laurel Smalley, high school administrator.

Still, what the ceremony looks like, where it is held and how many people can attend will depend on the situation in the county just ahead of the June event, Smalley added.

“We’re trying to think ahead,” she said. “If COVID’s done anything, it’s made us think ahead.”

Addams Family: ‘Theater can be done anywhere, anytime, anyhow’

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Aria Taylor as the Addams Ancestors.

In addition to the cast, Susee has a tech crew of four students: senior Jude Gomez, junior Lili Taylor, junior Ella Rodriguez and middle schooler Kaden Bingham. Junior Maggie Neuwirth is the student director.

Typically, Susee has assistance from choir director Kimber Parker, who works with the band and the cast to perfect the music portion of the production. However, Parker was out on maternity leave during rehearsals. Her substitute, Lindsey Wildman, wasted no time assuming Parker’s role.

“Her first day as a sub, she was there,” Susee said. “She’s stepped in and she’s directing (the students). She’s been a huge help.”

The show goes on

Even amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the high school’s drama program has continued, albeit in a different format. English teacher Susan Baertlein directed “Game of Tiaras,” a completely virtual show that streamed in February. Susee held auditions for “Addams Family” soon after.

“It was a quick turnaround,” she said.

Not wanting to deal with uncertainty and having to change course mid-way



Seaside School District

Seaside students rehearse a scene from “The Addams Family.”

through rehearsals, Susee decided from the start to offer the play online instead of having a live audience.

The students are meeting in-person for rehearsals — complete with masks and sign-ins for contact tracing

— and their performance will be recorded, an approach that has its pros and cons, Susee said. If there are mishaps that occur during recording, they can redo those sections.

“I get to kind of pick which version is better, so that’s kind

of nice,” she said. “In a live show, there are no do-overs.”

The virtual shows have also mitigated any concerns surrounding the completion of the high school building at the new campus on the hill, as well as the challenges of gathering in-person.

“Theater can be done anywhere, anytime, anyhow,” Susee said.

Yet she acknowledges the experience will still be a distinct experience for both the cast and the audience.

“With musicals, it’s about being there and having the band,” she said. “It’s definitely going to be different having people watch it in the privacy of their home.”

Even though this perform-

ing arts opportunity is inspiring unlike it has in previous years, it’s still important, in Susee’s opinion.

“As a teacher, I recognize that this last year has been crazy — crazy for everyone,” she said. “You hear a lot about the athletes — ‘the athletes need to play’ — but there are other groups, too. ... The students, they want to do something, they want to be active. Theater is able to give them that.”

Virtual audience members can select which day they want to watch the show. Tickets are \$10 per individual or \$20 per household. To purchase tickets for this virtual show, go to seasidehs.booktix.com/.

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