

**Yelm
Distributes
More Than
\$100K
to Businesses
A3**



NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS



\$100

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**Deaf Residents
Outline Struggles
With Masks
A7**

Younger Residents Drive Rise in COVID-19 Cases

As County Reaches 500 Cases, Health Officer Points to Increased Gatherings

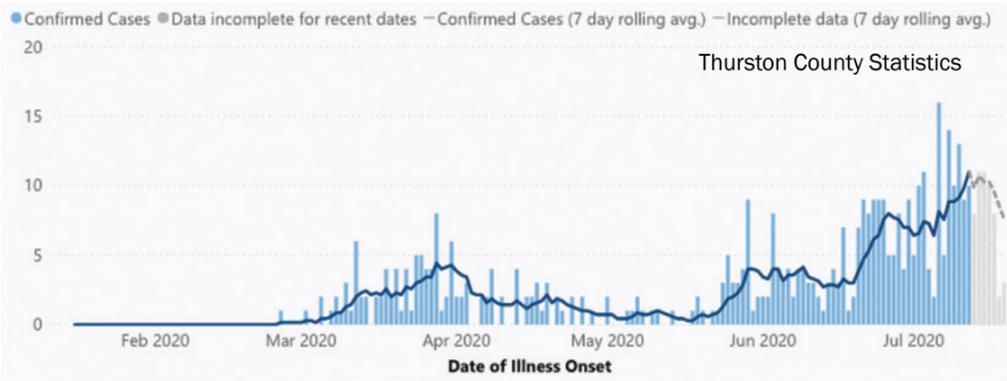
BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services has reported 495 total cases of COVID-19, as of Tuesday morning

press deadline, and the county will almost certainly surpass 500 this week based on current rates.

This comes as the county, state and country experience a surge in the number of new cases daily, and as the spread increases among younger people. Over the last week, nearly 100 new cases of the virus have been reported as well as four additional

■ SEE COVID-19, PAGE A9



Companies Sued After Wind Farm Worker's Death

Department of Labor and Industries Issues More Than \$500K in Fines as Family Files Lawsuit

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Three companies connected with the Skookumchuck Wind Farm project located on the Thurston-Lewis county border have been collectively fined more than \$500,000 by the Department of Labor and Industries in connection with a January trench collapse that killed a 24-year-old Chehalis man, according to the state agency.

Meanwhile, the family of Jonathan Stringer has filed a lawsuit against the company seeking unspecified damages.

An investigation by Labor and Industries found that the companies had operated with "numerous safety violations in connection with the incident."

Renewable Energy Systems-Americas (RES-Americas) System 3 LLC was cited for eight violations totaling \$360,874 and

■ SEE LAWSUIT, PAGE A9

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Jonathan Stringer

'Cute Ideas and Nice People': Parade Greet Yelm Senior Living Residents



Paul Dunn/Nisqually Valley News

A pink hot rod slowly rumbles in front of a group of residents at Prestige Senior Living Rosemont on Friday, July 17, during a special car parade.

Cars, Horses and More Pass Prestige Senior Living Rosemont Residents Who Have Been Isolated Due to COVID-19 Risks

BY PAUL DUNN
Nisqually Valley News

You could call it a very, very slow Daytona 500 — led by a passive stampede of adorable miniature horses.

And wow, was the event a hit.

We're talking, of course, about Yelm's very own Prestige Senior Living Rosemont Car Parade. That's right, 27 vehicles of all stripes, vintages and colors plus a gang — we use the term quite loosely —

■ SEE PARADE, PAGE A9



A couple of miniature horses from the Northwest Small Equine Club assemble behind Olympia Federal Savings in Yelm before the start of the Prestige Senior Living Rosemont car parade on Friday, July 17.

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Decked out in Hawaiian outfits, some festive kids and adults parade in front of appreciative residents at Prestige Senior Living Rosemont.

PARADE:

Continued From Page A1

of motorcycles. And, of course, a handful or two of miniature horses from the Northwest Small Equine Club.

The 30-minute parade on Friday, July 17, wound through the center's parking area and past the main entrance where a group of residents sat and cheered them on.

The unusual event enticed about 30 residents to venture outside for some fresh air and camaraderie on a relatively cool, sunny day. Other residents watched from windows in their rooms or from their balconies.

"We just wanted to put smiles on their faces," said Kylie Woods, Rosemont life enrichment director. "And we thank our community for their participation in the event."

As it turned out, most of the parade's drivers and passengers were relatives of Rosemont's resi-

dents, which was a treat in itself for many.

"Some of our residents hadn't seen their loved ones for some time because of our visitor restrictions with COVID-19," Woods explained. "It was just recently that family members could visit outside with our residents while maintaining safe social distancing."

Jeri Parker, 85, who has lived at Rosemont for nine months, got a big bang out of the parade — and got to see her daughter in one of the vehicles, to boot.

"I thought the parade was great," she said. "There were a lot of cute ideas and nice people."

Parker's husband of 68 years Keith Parker, 87, loved getting out in the "open air" for a special event.

"I liked the parade real well, and the T-Model Bucket car the most," he said. "I also liked the horses, because I can remember when Yelm was just a one-horse town."

Dick Drummond, 74, who has



Paul Dunn/Nisqually Valley News

Marion Partain, 90, who has lived at Prestige Senior Living Rosemont for 1 1/2 years, watches as a 1953 Pontiac 8 parades by her on Friday, July 17.



At left, Jeri Parker, 85, waves during the Prestige Senior Living Rosemont car parade. Parker has lived at Rosemont with her husband for nine months.

At right, Barbara Danly, 80, offers a double wave to participants during the Prestige Senior Living Rosemont car parade. Danly has lived at Rosemont for four years.

lived at Rosemont for a year, loved the show.

"It was fantastic," he said. "A lot of work went into it — getting all the cars ready and pointed in the right direction."



Barbara Danly, 80, who has lived at Rosemont for four years, was succinct, but enthusiastic in her praise.

"This has really been fun, you know?" she concluded.

COVID-19:

Continued From Page A1

hospitalizations in Thurston County.

County Public Health Director Schelli Slaughter noted during a Board of County Commissioners agenda setting meeting Tuesday, July 14, that lowering rates of hospitalizations and deaths within the county have been indicative of an increased spread in younger people, who are less likely to present serious symptoms or die.

Slaughter noted later that day that all 39 people who have been hospitalized in the county due to the virus, since the start of the pandemic, had one or more underlying health conditions that have been impacted by COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

"I don't have an average length of hospital stay, but I can say that we have had some patients that have been admitted for a very long time," Slaughter said. "Oftentimes with COVID-19, when people are hospitalized, they often need respiratory support and sometimes that means they're in the intensive care unit and they need a lot of care and tend to, once they're on a ventilator, be on it for a long time."

During the meeting, County Public Health Officer Dr. Dimyana Abdelmalek said the rise seen in recent weeks can be linked to an increase in the number of people gathering.

"We have been seeing a rise in COVID-19 cases in our community. Many of these cases are related to private gatherings of families and friends, some of which occurred over the Fourth

of July weekend. Some are related to travel, some are related to exposures in the workplace," she said.

"What we're seeing is something that's been seen nationally, which is when one member of a household gets sick, the other members of that household are at an extremely high risk of also contracting COVID-19," she said.

Abdelmalek said they're still encouraging people to continue taking the virus seriously, and she implored people to continue implementing social distancing measures of 6 feet in public, wearing facial coverings and washing their hands.

"While dialing back is a possibility, we are working really closely with our case investigators and contact tracers who are actually speaking to each case to find out what those specific risks

are here in Thurston and what's driving our local pattern of disease spread to make sure our response in Thurston is tailored to our needs as a county," she said.

Slaughter said that area hospitals are still reporting adequate levels of staffing personnel, available bed capacity and personal protective equipment, though the number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds are quite full.

The county is currently utilizing about 45 full time equivalents worth of contact tracers. Slaughter said Public Health plans on hiring 36 more positions, and of those 11 will support the case investigations and contact tracing.

She also noted they are expecting an increase in contact tracers will be needed as the pandemic continues into the fall.

Here are some additional numbers related to the coronavirus

situation both statewide and nationally as of Tuesday morning, July 21:

- Cases in Washington rose by about 14 percent compared with the week prior to 47,743 total cases, according to counts released Sunday night. The state has recorded a total 5,102 hospitalizations and 1,453 deaths, according to the Department of Health. A large influx of tests were also conducted last week, and the total count tallies at 826,354. The statewide percent of positive cases stands at about 5.8 percent, a 0.1-percent decrease when compared with last week.

- Nationwide, positive cases of COVID-19 stand at approximately 3,819,139, according to data last updated on Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There have been approximately 140,630 coronavirus-related deaths recorded.

LAWSUIT:

Continued From Page A1

RES Americas Construction Inc. was cited for six violations totaling \$184,800 related to the death.

A third company, GEMS, a medical service contractor, was cited for one serious violation and must pay \$4,200.

The lawsuit and investigation both stem from the Jan. 9 workplace death at the Skookumchuck Wind Project where a pair of trench collapses led to one worker being critically injured and another killed.

Stringer was working for Aerotek, a RES-America subcontractor, on a three-man team the morning of the incident. Their job was to get a sleeve under a road culvert roughly 15 feet deep to install a cable for the wind turbines. One of the men jumped into the trench in an attempt to feed the strap under the culvert when a portion of the trench collapsed and buried the worker in more than a foot of dirt.

Stringer and another worker responded quickly, jumping in to help him. But as the two were digging, a larger portion of the trench gave out, completely burying Stringer.

About 25 workers eventually arrived at the scene and attempted to dig him out. According to the lawsuit, it took about 30 hours for authorities to recover his body from the trench.

A report by the Thurston County Sheriff's Office, which was one of the first responders on scene, noted there was no shoring on the trench to prevent the collapse at the remote worksite, located 15 miles up narrow log-

ging roads in a spot with poor cellphone service.

"This incident is heartbreaking and frustrating," said Anne Soiza, assistant director in charge of Labor and Industries' Division of Occupational Safety and Health, in prepared remarks. "This fatality and the hospitalization of a worker were completely preventable. Trenching at this depth in the dead of winter after days of rain, in unstable soil with no trench box, was a recipe for disaster."

In addition to the numerous violations, Labor and Industries also found that the accident was entirely preventable.

Stringer's family described him as a loving man who enjoyed baseball, fishing and helping others. He's survived by his parents, as well as his 3-year-old daughter and his fiancée.

The 38-turbine Skookumchuck Wind Project, originally set to begin operating in December 2019, has undergone multiple setbacks and has yet to be completed.

Though the company began erecting turbines starting April of this year, the project is not expected to go online until sometime toward the end of 2020.

Back in April, Southern Power officials told The Nisqually Valley News that the structure was deemed 65 percent complete and that 350 contracted workers were working at the laydown yard in Vail, south of Rainier, and at the project on Skookumchuck Ridge.

Labor and Industries noted the department issued the largest fines possible for the working conditions that preceded the collapse of the trench.

"These violations were flagrant and they nearly led to a multiple-fatality incident. Sadly, they did cost one employee his life. For these reasons, the maximum penalty allowable under safety laws is being issued for the two most directly related willful violations," Soiza said.

“Trenching at this depth in the dead of winter after days of rain, in unstable soil with no trench box, was a recipe for disaster.”

**ANNE SOIZA
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR IN CHARGE OF
LABOR AND INDUSTRIES' DIVISION OF
OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH**

According to Labor and Industries, RES-America, the general contractor, hired RES System 3 to construct the wind farm.

"RES System 3 was most directly responsible for the work that day. The trapped worker hospitalized was a direct employee of RES System 3 and the man who died worked for Aerotek, a temporary labor agency contracted by RES System 3 to supply additional Labor," the news release states.

Because RES System 3 was the prime contractor working on the project, it faced the largest number of fines.

"The willful violations are for not having cave-in protection, having no competent person trained on trench safety on site, and having no written safety program tailored to the project," the news

release stated, adding that willful violations are the most serious.

Labor and Industries also found that RES System 3 acted indifferently to the site hazards and to rules and regulations regarding internal safety policies and procedures.

The nature of RES Americas' citations are for not ensuring subcontractors had and used cave-in protection and for not ensuring the subcontractor had a safety program tailored to the program.

RES Americas also faces two serious violations for improper use of a ladder and setup.

GEMS, a subcontractor providing onsite medical services, was fined for one serious violation for exposing two employees to hazards when they entered the unprotected trench.

According to Labor and Industries, the companies will have 15 business days from the time they receive the citation to either appeal or pay.

Companies Face Pending Lawsuit From Stringer's Estate

A lawsuit filed by the estate of Jonathan F. Stringer was amended to include RES System 3 following Labor and Industries' investigation, a lawyer representing the family said.

Stringer's estate originally filed suit back in May against RES-America, RES-America Construction and Weyerhaeuser Company for the alleged negligence that led to the death of Stringer, as well as requesting unspecified special damages.

Weyerhaeuser was not one of the companies involved in Labor

Thurston County Unemployment Rate Drops Sharply From 14.4 to 9 Percent

Nisqually Valley News

Thurston County's unemployment rate dropped sharply in June to 9.0 percent from 14.4 percent the previous month.

Out of 142,545 residents in the county's civilian labor force in June, 129,694 were employed and 12,851 unemployed. The previous month, 126,866 out of a labor force of 148,138 were employed — a 2 percent jump in employment for June.

Washington state's unemployment rate dropped to 9.8 percent in June, down from 15.1 percent the previous month. The month-to-month decrease of 5.3 percent was the largest since 1990, according to the state Employment Security Department.

The national unemployment rate also showed positive signs. It decreased from 13.3 percent in May to 11.1 percent in June.

The ESD noted that for the first time in 70 months (since September 2014) the Washington state unemployment rate is lower than the national rate. In June 2019, the national unemployment rate (revised) was 3.7 percent.

From Manufacturing to Retail, Demand for Firearms Puts Strain on Local Businesses

BY ERIC ROSANE
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It was already expected to be a busy year for firearm manufacturers and retailers. It is, after all, a presidential election year, which has a tendency to stoke political uncertainty in Americans and an increase in gun sales.

But before the election could arrive, a pandemic happened. Then there were protests over police use of force.

It was the perfect cocktail of unrest, and now local firearm manufacturers and retailers are experiencing an unexpected shortage of materials and products due to increased demands seen since early March, they say.

Shortly before opening on a recent Thursday, Tom Engel, owner of i5 Guns and Ammo, stood behind the glass counter that lines the perimeter of his showroom.

Rifles and other firearms were hung and displayed behind him, with roughly a third of the hangers bare. Some of the display holders underneath the glass counter were empty too.

Business for the small firearms retailer located off Martin Way has been booming, and that can be both a good and bad thing.

With everything that's going on in the world it's not just gun enthusiasts purchasing firearms any more, Engel said.

"There's a lot of people buying," he said. "Two things we've been hearing a lot is 'never thought I'd buy a gun' and 'never knew how hard it is to buy a gun.'"

Due to the nature of the nation's political climate, more people are purchasing accesso-

ries, firearms and ammunition, which Engel said has been unexpected. The downside to the increase in business is that it's now harder to keep merchandise on the shelves and sometimes even more difficult to come across products everybody wants to get their hands on.

"The numbers are better, but the largest thing is that inventory is exhausted," he said, adding that high-demand firearms include defensive shotguns and handguns.

With the scarcity of accessories and ammo also comes the increased demand for training.

"It's just like if somebody wants to drive a car, they're seeking out instruction and training," Engel said.

Engel, who networks and keeps in touch with experts in both manufacturing and distribution firearms sectors, said it's possible the country has surpassed the number of manufactured weapons it usually makes during the whole year in just four months alone.

The uptick in business first started back in March, around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System saw a record-breaking 3.7 million checks conducted during the month as a result.

The number of checks stayed high. Then, in June, more than 3.9 million checks were conducted, beating out March as the largest number of checks conducted in the last 22 years.

In recent years, the United States has been no stranger to historic ammunition shortages. The early years of Barack Obama's presidency also triggered increased sales of both



Brian Schuetz, owner of Olympic Arms, Inc., in Nisqually, cradles a couple of AR-15 rifles he built as he discusses his business on Wednesday, July 22.

ammunition and firearms, and National Instant Criminal Checks reflect this.

"President Obama was our greatest gun salesman," said Brian Schuetz, owner of Olympic Arms, Inc., which operates one of the country's oldest AR manufacturing shops on the Nisqually Delta. "I've been through this same type of thing five or six times ... There's always been these buying surges."

Having worked in firearm manufacturing since he was a teenager, Schuetz noted that the supply for AR (ArmaLite Rifle) and rifle parts just cannot keep up with the demand.

Working in the firearms manufacturing business can at most times be more volatile than it is lucrative. Schuetz said the

problem with the sudden demand surge is that the market often doesn't recover its supply for another six months after the rush is gone, leaving the industry dry.

"Right now, from what I've seen, getting almost any type of firearm that you want is hard to do right now. They're just not available," he said. "For me to buy parts to actually assemble some of these is hard to do. I can't get some of them. There was a glut and now there's guys scratching the ground just to find parts."

Schuetz, who has been head of Olympic Arms for more than 30 years, noted that just five years ago he had a staff of nearly 60 employees, but a surge and sudden price drop of the AR —

the company's primary product — led to the company having to lay off most of their staff.

A mix of government contracts and small customer business has kept their small staff busy throughout the years. For example, the shop just recently finished up a six-month government contract to build 6,000 training rifles.

Schuetz said their shop used to machine make many of the smaller parts used to assemble an AR, but today they have to order from other companies to save on costs. The problem is when production increases and those parts become high in demand, it can be more lucrative to machine make them instead of having to rely on the market place.

To Splash or Not To Splash: Yelm Council Grapples With Unlikely Opening of City's Splash Pad During Pandemic

BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

Last year, the City of Yelm's splash pad and new playground opened to widespread approval from parents and children alike.

From then until the fall months, kids could be seen every day playing near the 25-foot-tall eagle tower and its surrounding spray features.

But due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has seen a resurgence in spread during recent weeks, the splash pad hasn't yet opened this summer and likely won't.

During recent meetings, council members Terry Kaminski and Joe DePinto have advocated for having the city find some way to open and operate the splash pad in a safe manner, but Mayor JW Foster and City Administrator Michael Grayum have repeatedly noted that splash pads cannot operate until Phase 4 of Gov. Jay Inslee's "Safe Start" plan.

"I really realize that it's pretty impractical," Kaminski said. "If there was a way that we could really make it work, I would support that."

According to Foster, requirements to operate the splash pad would generally fall under Phase 4, which would allow for all businesses and activities to resume with continued social distancing measures.

Thurston County — along

with 17 of Washington's 39 counties — is currently in Phase 3 of the plan. There are currently no guidelines set for counties to enter into Phase 4.

During a July 7 council study session, Public Works Director Cody Colt said it was possible for the city to open the splash pad under Phase 3, though there would need to be strict adherence to the 6-foot rule and a 50-person limit, which would likely require a staffed person to be there during hours of operation.

This would be only probable if the City of Yelm could get an OK from the state Department of Health.

Since Colt's comments on July 7, Inslee revised Phase 3 requirements to limit public gatherings to only 10 people due to increased spread of the virus.

Kaminski and DePinto previously advocated for either hiring a part-time worker to enforce social distancing measures or having a volunteer oversee the splash pad.

"That's asking an awful lot of a city employee to go out there and play COVID police," council member Tad Stillwell said during the July 7 study session. "I would love to see it open."

DePinto chimed in after Stillwell's comments, saying that he wouldn't mind volunteering for that.

Speaking later with The

Nisqually Valley News, Foster said that while the Department of Health gave them a path to opening the water feature during Phase 3, it was ultimately unrealistic to achieve — especially with the restriction on gatherings of up to 10 people.

"Not to mention the expense and potential liability to the city. You can't get kids to stay 6 feet apart on a splash pad," he said. "We're going to help our community stay healthy by following those regulations by the state."

Foster said other splash pads around the area, including Olympia's, have been closed during the pandemic.

One citizen recently messaged Foster asking what they could do since her kids loved water so much. He gave them a list of natural waterways to go to



The splash pad at Yelm City Park has been shut down due to concerns about COVID-19.

including the McKenna access park, Lake Lawrence and the Deschutes River in Tumwater.

"They're not in Yelm, but they're available to us," he said.

Foster said the important thing to take into account is that there will be a day when the splash pad reopens to the public — even if it's not this summer.

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Teachers Go On Parade for Students
A2



Rainier Senior to Play Collegiate Soccer
A6

Yelm to Receive \$274,000 in COVID-19 Relief Funds

By Nisqually Valley News Staff

The City of Yelm will receive approximately \$274,050 in flexible relief funding through the federal CARES Act, according to the Washington State Department of Commerce.

Thurston County and its surrounding city governments will

receive a combined \$20 million in funding. The Department of Commerce says nearly \$300 million in relief funds were allocated based on population, and added that municipalities could use these funds on a flexible basis.

“Cities and counties are the places we live — and they are the governments closest to the



Yelm Mayor JW Foster

people,” Commerce Director Lisa Brown said in a statement on Friday, May 8. “They are taking extraordinary measures to protect their residents during the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to provide the basic services we rely on. Commerce is committed to moving these critical dollars as quickly as possible so communities can plan and prepare for safe reopening and recovery.”

According to the Department of Commerce, local governments

will be responsible for making determinations on what expenditures are necessary in accordance with the COVID-19 financial recovery rules. A list of expenditures will not need to be disclosed, and cities can spend resources on anything

■ SEE RELIEF, PAGE A7

Cases of COVID-19 in Thurston County Remain Steady

State Looks at Second Phase of Reopening

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Thurston County Public Health and Social Services reported an additional 11 cases of COVID-19 the week ending Sunday, May 10, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 123.

The county has reported one coronavirus-related death in the two months since the first case of the virus was reported. As of Tuesday, May 12, 19 individuals have been hospitalized due to the virus and 113 individuals have recovered.

A map released by Thurston County Public Health and Social Services shows that ZIP codes 98501, 98503 and 98513 have the highest number of cases, with each registering more than 15. Yelm’s ZIP code has had between five and nine cases while the Rainier area has had less than five.

Here are some additional numbers relating the coronavirus situation statewide and nationally:

- Washington state has recorded approximately 17,122

■ SEE COVID-19, PAGE A7

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Yelm’s Frontline Workers Get High-Flying Salute

JBLM 62nd Airlift Wing Salutes Yelm Health Care, Frontline Workers With Regional Flyover



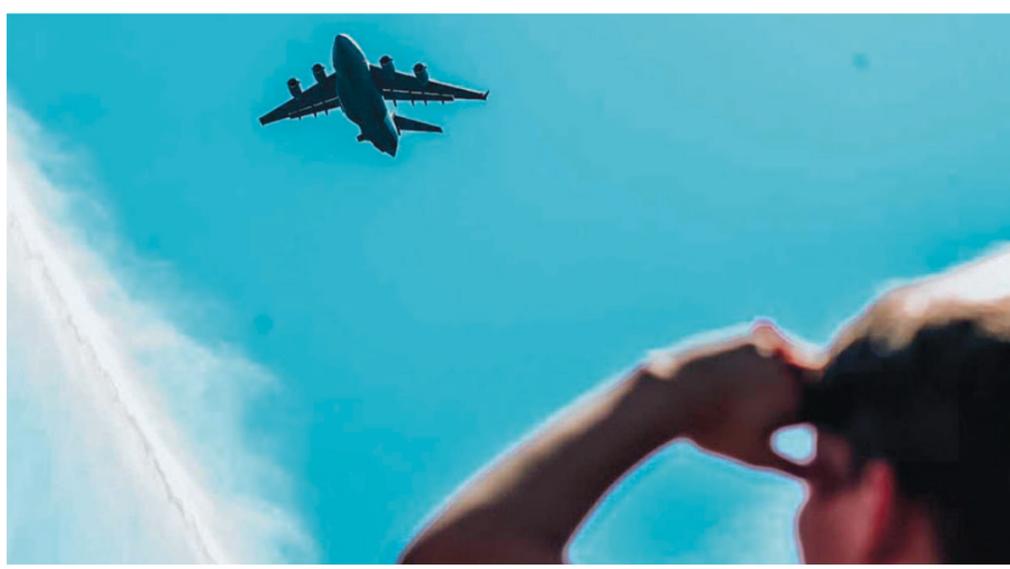
Jared Wenzelburger / Nisqually Valley News

Two Boeing C-17 Globemaster cargo planes approach the Yelm Family Medicine Plaza on Friday, May 8, as a Southeast Thurston Fire Authority engine shoots water into the air.

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Soaring at low altitudes, two Boeing C-17 Globemaster cargo planes passed overhead the Yelm Family Medicine Plaza on Friday, May 8, as about 100 or so health care workers, first responders and residents watched in awe and appreciation.

The flyover salute put on by Joint Base Lewis-McChord’s 62nd Airlift Wing was part of a larger regional flyover, which took place from 12:30 p.m to 2:44 p.m. in an effort to salute the Americans working daily on the frontlines of the



■ SEE FLYOVER, PAGE A7

An onlooker watches as a Boeing C-17 Globemaster cargo plane passes over the Yelm Family Medicine Plaza.

SE Thurston Fire Authority Removes Bond Measure to Revitalize Stations From August Ballot

BY ERIC ROSANE
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The Southeast Thurston Fire Authority will be delaying a bond proposition previously set for the August ballot that would have paid for the remodeling of two of the agency’s facilities if passed.

The decision was made due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, specifically the impacts it has had on the economy.

“We just don’t believe now is

the appropriate time to do that. We’re going to push the project back until we can get a good picture of what the economy looks like and what the jobless numbers look like,” Fire Chief Mark King said on Tuesday.

With the pandemic leaving agencies such as SETFA in finan-



Fire Chief Mark King

cial uncertainty, the department has opted to restrict expenditures down to essential spending only, King said. That means SETFA has put all nonessential projects on hold until the staff has a better understanding of what the financial outlook past the current budget cycle will look like.

SETFA’s August ballot measure would have substantially rebuilt Station 22 out on Lake Lawrence and provided a housing remodel for Station 24 in Rainier.

King said those two projects are important because the fire department will need to eventually bring on more volunteers and career staff. Due to restraints with infrastructure, SETFA is unable to expand their force as the area grows in population and the agency sees an increase in need.

The improvements to the two facilities were expected to improve call response times and lower insurance rates for a number of residents.



One of two Boeing C-17 Globemaster cargo planes passed overhead the Yelm Family Medicine Plaza on Friday, May 8, as about 100 or so health care workers, first responders and residents watched in awe and appreciation.

FLYOVER:

Continued From Page A1

COVID-19 pandemic.

The duo of cargo planes flew over more than 30 health care facilities in the region, spanning as far north as Oak Harbor and as far south as Elma. The team's pass over Yelm was one of the final stops before flying over Madigan Army Medical Center and landing back at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

Brenda Longmire, office manager at Yelm Family Medicine, said her staff was very ap-

preciative of the heart-warming tribute.

She said her staff had been "very excited about this for the last couple days when they found out," and added that a number of her workers that have been working from home came in specifically for the occasion.

"We appreciate our heroes thinking of us," she said.

In addition to the many health care workers outside who wore medical masks with cellphones in hand to record the display, responders from the Yelm Police Department, Thurston Medic



Jared Wenzelburger / Nisqually Valley News

Two Boeing C-17 Globemaster cargo planes approach the Yelm Family Medicine Plaza on Friday, May 8, as a Southeast Thurston Fire Authority engine shoots water into the air.

One, and the Southeast Thurston Fire Authority also stopped by to witness the spectacle and show support.

In the leadup to the flyover, which took place promptly at 2:23 p.m., SETFA firefighters angled their engine's hose in an

upward fashion, opening it up and spraying water roughly 50 feet up into the air.

Yelm Mayor JW Foster, who reached out to the Airlift Wing earlier in the week requesting that Yelm be added to the route, said he was excited about the fly-

over and detailed his appreciation shortly after in a message.

"I'm just appreciative of the 62nd Airlift Wing airmen and their leadership in creating this awesome flying tribute to our medical teams on the ground. #WeGotThisYelm," Foster wrote.

COVID-19:

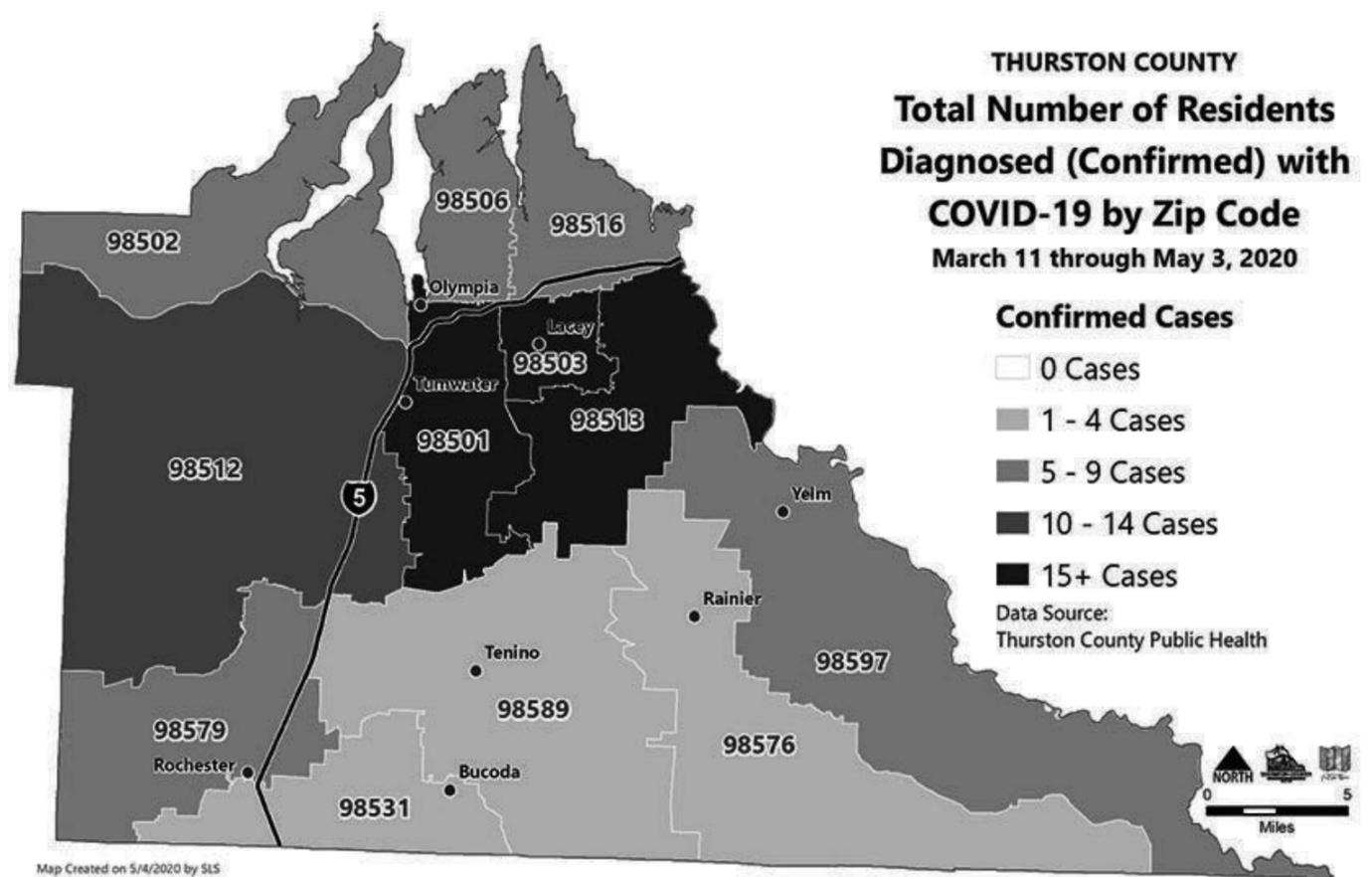
Continued From Page A1

cases and 945 total deaths, as of late Sunday night, May 10. More than 252,000 tests have been administered to Washingtonians and the percent of positive cases is at about 6.8 percent. Most cases have been recorded around Snohomish, King, Pierce counties and, in recent weeks, Yakima County.

• Positive cases of COVID-19 surpassed one million in the U.S. last week, and now stand at a total 1,324,488. There have been approximately 79,756 coronavirus-related deaths, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported as of Monday, May 11.

On Monday, May 11, Gov. Jay Inslee, alongside state legislators and other western state governors, sent a letter to Congress requesting a total \$1 trillion in state and local aid. The letter was cosigned by House Speaker Laurie Jinkins, D-Tacoma, and Senate Majority Leader Andy Billig, D-Spokane.

"Without federal support, states and cities will be forced to make impossible decisions — like whether to fund critical public health care that will help us recover, or prevent layoffs of teachers, police officers, firefighters and other first responders," the letter read. "And, without additional assistance, the very programs that will help people get



back to work — like job training and help for small business owners — will be forced up on the chopping block."

Inslee on Monday also gave additional guidance on the partial reopening of dine-in restaurants and the tavern industry, the workers of which have been hit

especially hard due to state-mandated business closures. These industries are part of the state's second phase of reopening.

Under phase two of the governor's plan, restaurants will be able to reopen under strict guidance to adhere to social distancing measures. They will also

reportedly be required to keep a 30-day record of contact information from customers in case contact tracing is needed.

Businesses will be able to operate at 50 percent of the building's maximum occupancy or lower, tables must be placed far enough apart to adhere to the

6 feet rule and there can be no more than five customers per party.

According to Inslee's office, each phase will be at least three weeks apart. Metrics and data will guide when the state can move from one phase to another, he said.

RELIEF

Continued From Page A1

from public and human services expenditures to small businesses and economic support.

"The fund is designed to provide ready funding to address un-

foreseen financial needs and risks created by the COVID-19 public health emergency," according to information from the Department of Commerce's website.

Rainier will receive \$63,300, Tenino will receive \$55,200, Bucoda and Roy will receive

\$25,000, and the county government will receive \$15.72 million.

Yelm Mayor JW Foster said while rules on spending the funds are fairly flexible, the city is working to thoroughly review the guidelines on how the funds can be spent.

The hope is to potentially set up a grant program for affected businesses and distribute funds to local organizations that have been at the forefront of responding to the COVID-19 crisis, such as the Yelm Community Services food bank.

Foster said he doesn't have a timeline on when the city could expect to begin utilizing the funds.

"This is in effect our own taxpayers' money coming home, and we want to make sure that we're taking full advantage of it," he said.

NEWS BRIEFS

Thurston United Way to Provide Grants for Emergency Food, Shelter Resources

By Nisqually Valley News Staff

Thanks to federal funds recently dispersed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the United Way of Thurston County is now accepting grant applications to allocate more than \$350,000 to organizations providing emergency food and shelter to those in need.

The funds were appropriated through Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency through the Emergency Food Shelter Program, Phase 27 and federal CARES Act.

According to a press release from United Way, funds will be available through a grant application process. Applications are open now through Monday, May 18, and the materials can be found at this link: [www.unitedway-thurston.org/emergency-food-and-](http://www.unitedway-thurston.org/emergency-food-and-shelter-program)

shelter-program.

"Nonprofit, faith-based or governmental organizations that provide emergency food or shelter are eligible to apply for these funds," the release reads. "The intent is to supplement and expand currently available resources for emergency food and shelter in Thurston County."

Prioritization will be based on the needs of the community, the release states. For more information, contact Paul Larsen with the United Way of Thurston County at plarsen@unitedway-thurston.com or 360-943-2773, extension 113.

Rep. Heck Introduces Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act

By Nisqually Valley News Staff

U.S. Rep. Denny Heck, D-Wash., on Friday, May 8, intro-

duced the Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act to the House of Representatives.

The congressman's legislation would establish a program to provide \$100 billion in rental assistance to residents during the COVID-19 outbreak, according to an announcement from his office, and is based on the Emergency Solutions Grant program that already supports short-term emergency rental assistance.

"Millions of Americans are facing new financial uncertainty, through no fault of their own. This bill will help tenants pay their rent, without placing the burden on landlords, many of whom are relying on payments from renters to pay their mortgages," Heck said in a statement. "It is vital to our recovery and to the wellbeing of Americans that we do everything we can to keep people in their homes."

The piece of legislation has received the support of 113 House cosponsors, Heck's office says, and was also introduced in the Senate by Sen. Sherrod Brown,

D-Ohio.

Heck's office also states that by using the Emergency Solutions Grant program's infrastructure, the legislation will work in an efficient and effective manner to distribute much-needed funds.

Olympia Lawyer Enters Race for 10th Congressional District

By Nisqually Valley News Staff

Jackson Maynard, general counsel for the Building Industry Association of Washington and longtime Olympia-area attorney, announced Tuesday, May 5, his intent to run for congress. He enters a race of about a dozen other candidates vying to replace 10th Congressional District Rep. Denny Heck, who is retiring from his position and running for lieutenant governor.

According to Maynard's campaign, the Republican candidate

plans on officially announcing his candidacy at a Facebook town hall on Thursday, May 7, at 10 a.m., where he will also talk about ways the district can bounce back following the economic crisis brought on by state-mandated closures due to COVID-19.

"COVID recovery is the number one issue facing our country. The virus has knocked us down but we can hit back," his campaign said.

After laying out the highlights of his recovery plan, Maynard will then answer questions and listen to comments and concerns.

Maynard has spent about 19 years as a practicing attorney and currently works for the Building Industry Association of Washington, an Olympia-based nonprofit that lobbies state government and regulatory agencies to benefit affordable housing and the building industry.

Throughout his practice, Maynard has worked as a prosecutor, a construction lawyer for a state transportation agency, and has advised the state Senate as staff counsel.

County COVID-19 Cases Spike Due to Outbreaks

Single Employee Linked to Outbreaks at Two Long-Term Care Facilities

BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

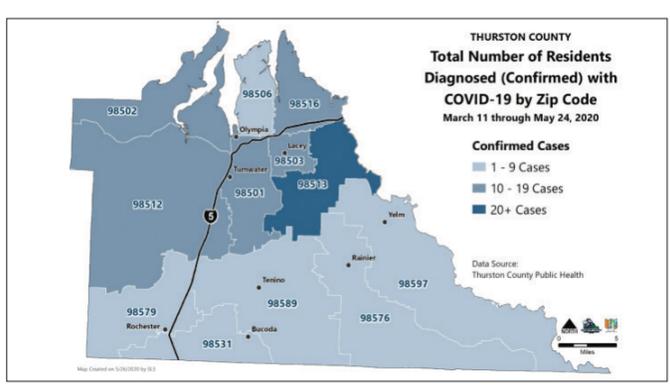
A recent uptick in the number of reported COVID-19 cases has been linked to Thurston County's first outbreaks at two long-term care facilities that are linked through a staff member who works at both.

Thurston County Public Health Disease investigators are working on the outbreaks, which are defined as two or more linked cases.

two cases at Olympics West Retirement Inn, located in Tumwater. The individuals reportedly became ill at the same time, which was indicative that they were exposed by someone asymptomatic, meaning they presented no symptoms of the disease.

Several other staff at the facility also reported symptoms

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'Violence and Destruction Has No Place'

Inslee Addresses Protests Over George Floyd Death

BY RICK BANNAN
For Nisqually Valley News

Gov. Jay Inslee addressed the recent protests hitting Washington cities following the death of a black man in Minnesota, calling the outrage justifiable but pushing back against violence escalating from demonstrations.

During a press conference Monday, June 1, the governor spoke about protests across the state and the nation, with some U.S. cities seeing looting and property damage. The demonstrations were over the death of George Floyd, a black Minneapolis man who died May 25 after a police officer, Derek Chauvin, held down Floyd's neck for almost nine minutes.

■ SEE **PROTESTS**, PAGE A8

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'A Grand Reopening'

Some Yelm Businesses Forge Ahead as County Enters Phase 2



Kyle Phillips, 49, owns White Horse Tavern on Yelm Avenue. He's excited that Thurston County has been approved to enter Phase 2 of Gov. Jay Inslee's Safe Start plan and has opened the tavern to the public following strict social distancing and occupancy guidelines.

Business Owners Are Adapting to Restrictions and Counting Losses After Months of Government-Mandated Closures

BY ERIC ROSANE AND PAUL DUNN
Nisqually Valley News

At first, they were told it would be two weeks. Then, it was a month.

Next thing they knew — with more than two months of closures, profits gone and savings accounts drained — it was time for businesses to reopen.

On Wednesday, May 27, Thurston County was given the OK by the state Department of Health to enter into Phase 2 of Gov. Jay Inslee's four-phased "Safe Start" reopening plan — the first step toward a hopeful return to normalcy.

When Kyle Phillips, owner of the White Horse Tavern, heard about the news, he im-

mediately left his house and headed for his bar. It was time to dust off the seats and set up cash registers.

"I think we've all just been chomping at the bit to open," said Phillips, 49.

During months of state-mandated business closures due to the coronavirus crisis, the White Horse Tavern — a decade-old downtown staple located on Yelm Avenue — has been open only three days a week, selling to-go food orders in an effort to stay afloat.

On Wednesday, May 27, the establishment opened to serve guests in-house. The bar was open from 8:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. and, due to Phase 2 restrictions, was only able to open its door to 50 percent of its normal capacity.

Phillips said those first two weeks of being closed were tough. While he's been able to pay his employees, Phillips said he hasn't paid himself since March when the closures first started.

He also estimates he's lost \$60,000 over the two-month closure.

"Losing profits for over two months, that dug into my personal savings almost to the point of draining it," he said.

■ SEE **BUSINESS**, PAGE A8



As he waited to get his first haircut in months, Yelm resident Chris Fazzino, 49, front left, bonded with his pug dogs Pluto and Nova and other customers Monday outside Kathie's Barber Shop on First Street.

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BUSINESS:*Continued From Page A1*

"I've actually got to the point where I've had to sell some personal items to stay afloat."

But even as Phillips and the White Horse have hit turbulent times, they plan to keep going.

Since closing due to the coronavirus, the White Horse has missed three dates that were likely to be their most profitable of the year — St. Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo and the tavern's 10-year anniversary, which was May 19.

"I sat in here with a Coca Cola alone," Phillips said, adding that they plan to celebrate those occasions at a later date.

While the White Horse launches into its reopening, other businesses are still weighing the cost.

Bahman Robinson and Jenny Smith, the husband and wife owners of Ma and Pa's Family Diner just a block from White Horse, said they're not sure if they'll be reopening their facility to customers.

The duo has been operating to-go orders from their drive-through window during the crisis and they aren't sure if the potential profits from four tables — their 50 percent occupancy with social distancing — would provide enough incentive. Plus, the business owners also recently closed their second business, Jenny's Barnhouse, across the river in McKenna, which was their first venture they opened more than three years ago.

The husband and wife are trying to balance operating their diner six days a week by themselves while homeschooling their three kids.

"Everything we're doing, we're doing ourselves right now for the most part, and it's just been a taxing process," Robinson said. "We'll get through this ... The people that are putting in the time and the people that are still trying to do their thing are going to make it through this. A lot of people are going to make it through this — there are a lot of strong businesses in this town."



Paul Dunn / pdunn@yelmonline.com

Bahman Robinson and Jenny Smith own Ma & Pa's Family Diner on Yelm Avenue. They're grateful that Thurston County has been approved to enter Phase 2 but have yet to decide if they will open their dining room to customers. In the meantime, they are offering take-out meals.

While revenue has declined, Robinson said in order for them to open up and make a profit they'd have to be able to seat more than 50-percent capacity. Ultimately, Phase 2 benefits larger restaurants more than smaller ones, he said.

"Fifty percent capacity, you starting bringing back a bunch of employees, isn't really going to pay the bills. It's just going to be more overhead," he said.

Robinson said they plan on re-evaluating the situation on June 1.

Line Critchfield, executive director of the Yelm Area Chamber of Commerce, said businesses have definitely struggled throughout these closures. But many of the small business owners, she added, have also been resilient in their ability to adapt to the climate of a pandemic.

"I think we're just excited to get people reopened again and excited to do the things in Yelm that we all love to do," she said.

The previous weekend, the Yelm Farmers Market reopened

for its first day of the season. Critchfield said she was able to sneak in for a bit and take a look at the businesses and their scaled-back approach.

"The farmers market is one of my favorite things in Yelm, and it was good to have that little sense of normalcy even if it was a little different," she said.

Kathie Bennett, owner of Kathie's Barber Shop, opened her shop for the first time in two and a half months on Monday, June 1.

Bennett, who has owned and operated the establishment at 303 First Street for about a decade, said the first day back was busier than it was before the shutdown.

By the end of her first day, her shop was seeing nearly twice the number of customers they regularly get.

"It was awesome," she said about moving to Phase 2. "I couldn't wait to get back to work."

One customer in particular had been waiting outside her door for about two hours be-

fore they reopened.

"As long as we last, we'll keep serving customers," Bennett said. "I don't want to leave people out there waiting and cut them off."

Leon Collins, owner of Bob's Bar and Grill on Yelm Avenue located at 108 E. Yelm Ave., said he's counting himself lucky after the full-on shutdown.

Despite losing \$80,000 in gross revenue, Collins said they were able to stay up to date on their bills and business taxes.

"My girls were all waiting for me to be open," he said. "It was exciting to open ... It's kind of like a grand reopening."

The business reopened at 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 28, and was able to fill up its 53 seats fairly quickly.

About 20 minutes after reopening, a familiar face was back at the bar — Ralph Marten, the 92-year-old veteran who served in the Army's 78th Infantry Division and well-known regular.

Phase 2 allows several busi-

ness sectors — including restaurants, bars, barbers, salons and others — to welcome customers again with limits placed on occupancy and other requirements. Manufacturing, construction, in-store retail, real estate and professional office-based services will also be allowed to reopen with restrictions and precautions.

Details for the Phase 3 variance are still being developed, but according to Inslee's office, counties will need to continue to demonstrate health care readiness, prompt testing capacities and availability, low caseloads and contact tracing abilities.

When the county moves into Phase 3, groups of up to 50 individuals will be permitted, including sports and recreational activities, residents will be allowed to resume non-essential travel, restaurants and bars will be able to open to less than 75 percent capacity, and other business activities besides night clubs and events with 50 or more people will be able to resume.

PROTESTS:*Continued From Page A1*

Chauvin now faces third-degree murder and manslaughter charges.

Protests that led to confrontations with police and property damage hit both Seattle and Portland over the weekend, though not all protests in the region turned violent. On Sunday both Vancouver and Centralia were able to have more peaceful demonstrations than bigger cities.

Inslee said people were "justifiably outraged at the killing of George Floyd," due to "police irresponsibility to a person of color."

"A denial of one person's liberty, in this case, was a denial of one person's life," Inslee said, "and when that happens, everyone's liberty is reduced."

Inslee spoke of three values which he said were "entirely consistent with one another, because they all point to the necessity of justice in our community," — those being outrage over Floyd's death, a ceasing of violence and property damage, and the efforts of those in the community to rebuild ties after turmoil. For the last value he gave an example of numerous Washingtonians who the morning after a night of

demonstrations descended on Seattle to clean up from the night's events.

Acknowledging that the ability to petition for a redress of grievances was a constitutional right, "violence and destruction has no place in this, it is not productive and it is not constitutionally-protected," Inslee said. Fires started in Seattle were "totally unacceptable," noting that some peaceful demonstrators were urging those looking to damage property to stop, "sometimes to no avail."

People causing violence should be "prudently prosecuted, and they will be," Inslee said, adding it was important not to allow the acts of violence to "obscure the justice of the underlying protest" and peaceful protestors' efforts.

"We just can't allow violence to hijack peaceful protest," Inslee remarked.

As part of responses to mass demonstrations Inslee said Seattle had requested assistance from the Washington National Guard Saturday, with the state approving activation of up to 200 servicemembers to serve to "guard critical infrastructure (and) reduce property damage." Inslee stressed that members of the Guard were "unarmed peacekeepers" and likened

their activation to similar movements for combating wildfires, or more pertinently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic currently going on in background to the demonstrations. He added that Guardsmen would only respond at the request of local leaders.

Inslee noted that the impacts of COVID-19 had disproportionately affected communities of color, with higher infection rates in black and hispanic Washingtonians than the per-capita rate and black workers hit harder by job loss.

The disproportionate effects of COVID-19 showed that inequities for the black community were greater than the injustice of Floyd's death, as Inslee pointed to a need to address the bigger picture of disparities for education and healthcare among others.

"I do believe we are going to make progress on this together, because we all understand our responsibilities," Inslee remarked.

With potential for a resurgence of COVID-19 given mass gatherings for demonstrations, Inslee pleaded to demonstrators — "please protect the protestor next to you" by wearing masks and attempting to keep physical distance.

Regarding ongoing efforts from the guard, Washington

State commander Maj. Gen. Bret Daugherty said about 300 Guardsmen were in position in Seattle, Bellevue and Spokane for the evening.

Daugherty said that the main threat were looters at that point, "clearly criminal activity worthy of being arrested and sent to jail, but not deserving deadly force," he explained. Should greater threats emerge he said the Guard could go to the governor to discuss increasing armaments.

Daugherty noted that Guardsmen were with groups of law enforcement that were fully armed, making a need to arm his units less necessary.

"The risk right now of an incidental shooting, I think, just outweighs the value of having people armed right now, especially when we have our police partners fully armed," Daugherty said. "The more weapons there are at a site, the more likely you are to have an accidental shooting."

The commander urged demonstrators to "calm down, leave your weapons at home, peacefully demonstrate as much as you want to, but let's not make this a situation any worse than it has to be."

Inslee remarked about a call with governors and President Donald Trump earlier in the day

when the president pushed state leaders to be tougher on violence escalating from protests, calling for states to "dominate" the situation. The governor said Trump's comments on the situation "had been rooted in a desire to fan the flames of division, rather than to call us to a higher purpose."

"I think they (the comments) are more like rants of a very insecure man than a person asking us to find the better angels in our nature," Inslee said. "I think the most helpful thing the president could do at this point is to enjoy silence, and let governors do the great work, and very tough work, that they are doing."

Inslee had an emotional moment when recounting the April 4, 1968, assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., learning of the activist's death from his father. He recalled the words of statesman Robert Kennedy, who called for a rejection of the temptation of slipping into deeper divisions.

"What we need in the United States is not division. What we need in the United States is not hatred. What we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness, but love and wisdom, and compassion to one another, and a feeling of justice towards those who still suffer in our country," Inslee quoted.

CASES:*Continued From Page A1*

consistent with COVID-19, the disease caused by novel coronavirus.

On May 27 and 28, staff with Thurston County Public Health and Social Services visited the facility and tested the 139 residents and 62 staff members. Those who tested positive were ordered to isolate and the rest of the individuals were ordered to quarantine pending the results.

During the incident, Public Health learned that one of the staff members worked at another long-term care facility, which is not currently being named in order to

notify the facility's families. The person who worked at both facilities later developed symptoms.

Public Health contact tracers were able to make contact with the facility.

During the week of May 25-May 31, Public Health confirmed 23 total cases of coronavirus — the highest number of new cases confirmed since the county's peak back in late March.

On Saturday, May 30, the county confirmed 12 new cases. Most of the individuals confirmed that day were either in their 50s or older, though two were confirmed to be in their 20s.

As of Tuesday morning press deadline, Thurston County Public

Health has reported 155 cases of COVID-19, with 130 of those individuals having reported a recovery.

The county's death toll from the virus stands at one person. Twenty Thurston County residents are currently hospitalized.

Acting Public Health Officer Dr. Diana Yu said the department and staff working on the case are expecting more cases to be confirmed as results come back from testing the two facilities.

"While we had hoped not to see any outbreaks like this in our community, it is something we are prepared to handle," she said in a statement. "We are taking all the necessary actions to test, contract trace, quarantine and isolate

as appropriate."

Yu also said this is a reminder that transmission of the disease is still happening throughout the community, and warned individuals to isolate from others if they become symptomatic.

So far, approximately 9,223 residents in the county have been tested for the virus. The percent-positive rate of 2 percent still stands well below the state's average.

People with symptoms, such as fever, a new cough and trouble breathing, should call their health care provider ahead for guidance. Early symptoms related to the virus also include extreme fatigue and new loss of taste or smell.

Here are some additional

numbers relating the coronavirus situation statewide and nationally:

- Washington state has recorded approximately 21,977 cases, 3,517 hospitalizations and 1,002 total deaths. More than 365,000 tests have been administered to Washingtonians, and the percent of positive cases is at about 6 percent. Most cases have been recorded around Snohomish, King, Pierce counties and, in recent weeks, Yakima County.

- Nationally, positive cases of COVID-19 stand at a total 1,767,680. There have been approximately 104,396 coronavirus-related deaths, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported as of Monday.



Brian and Leila Willard experienced severe flooding to their home during early February flooding on the Nisqually River. While their home is refurbished, they're living in a 2007 Jayco travel trailer with their three children. They are L-R: Josiah, 12, Serina, 6, and Selah, 8.



Paul Dunn/Nisqually Valley News

Brian and Leila Willard experienced severe flooding to their home on 6th Avenue S.E. in Nisqually during early February flooding on the Nisqually River. While their home in the background is refurbished, they're living in a 2007 Jayco travel trailer and raising a garden hoping sheets of cardboard will kill the surrounding grass in their yard.

For Nisqually Delta Residents, First Came a Flood, Then a Pandemic

Tacoma Power Maintains Lack of Liability for February Flooding; Residents Decry Inaction by County

BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

Patches of fertile soil sowed with onions, pumpkins, corn and watermelon seeds glisten on a recent Wednesday afternoon outside of Brian and Leila Willard's home on the 11400 block of Sixth Avenue, about a quarter of a mile from the Nisqually River.

It's a slow-going day for the couple, their three children and two cats. The small family last month moved into a 31-foot-long Jayco fifth-wheel on their property, and they've been slowly working to rebuild their home after a flood in February brought the Nisqually River waters into their residence.

Starting over can be hard, the family says, and it can seem even more difficult when there's a global pandemic going on.

That has been evidenced by their daughter.

"She's been in complete upheaval. Her behavior, there's been a lot of digression," Leila Willard said of her special needs daughter, who hasn't been able to attend school due to the closures. "And being homeless during a pandemic has been a whole new challenge, for sure."

It's been roughly four months since major flooding on the lower Nisqually River delta ruined a sense of normalcy for residents. Many haven't moved far from where the floodwaters left them, either due to the COVID-19 pandemic or to the vast number of hurdles it takes to get back in the swing of things.

At the moment — with rising needs and slim resources due to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic — there's no timeline on when the Willards could be back in their house.

"Faith is a huge thing, because right now I'm just going off the good faith of others," said Brian Willard, 35, a U.S. Army veteran with a disability that affects his mobility. "Just keep focusing on the next step. There are days where it's hard. You try to push away those thoughts and feelings of feeling defeated — it's hard. It's a conscious effort to not focus on that."

Steve Bridwell, 63, a neighbor of Willard, agrees that it's been a struggle. Like his neighbor, Bridwell was living for less than a

year in his home before the floodwaters arrived.

Because Bridwell had coverage, his insurance was set to pay for the damage, he said. But the coronavirus crisis has put a major roadblock in their rebuilding efforts.

"It's put a stop sign in front of everything," Bridwell said. "Nothing has been streamlined in this situation, and us being uneducated

"Faith is a huge thing, because right now I'm just going off the good faith of others.

Just keep focusing on the next step. There are days where it's hard. You try to push away those thoughts and feelings of feeling defeated — it's hard.

It's a conscious effort to not focus on that.

**BRIAN WILLARD, 35,
A U.S. ARMY VETERAN**

in this situation has been a real learning process."

Bridwell said he's also been unhappy with the response, or lack thereof, he's been getting from county staff, who vowed to help lead dialogue on recovery efforts before the virus hit.

"Thurston County hasn't done nothing," he said. "I've been very disappointed in that ... I guess they've figured we can make it on our own. But I will make it. My wife's strong like me and we'll stick it out, and we'll just try and get ready for the next one."

Back in early April, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), a branch of the U.S. Department of Energy, filed an inquiry to see if Tacoma Power, the operators of the Nisqually River Hydroelectric Project upstream, had violated its license requirement when it increased the rate of water released from the twindam project to 17,000 cubic feet per second on Feb. 6.

That decision has largely been linked to the flooding that occurred downriver. The Puget Sound region as a whole was undergoing record-breaking rainfall at the time, and the delta was one of the hardest hit locations.

On June 9, Tacoma Power submitted its data and findings to FERC, concluding that it had acted within its license during the time of the flood.

Tacoma Power claims changes in its license would not mitigate flooding downstream and also noted that substantial runoff from streams downriver from the dams



played a big role in the rising flood waters.

During the February flood's peak, the Nisqually River Project data shows it released 15,200 cubic feet per second of water, but flows downstream combined to an estimated 21,500, according to combined downstream gages.

"Tacoma Power has followed its requirements set in the Nisqually Project license during the storms of early 2020," wrote Keith Underwood, natural resources manager at Tacoma Power. "Operation of the project was able to reduce some flooding impact on residents of the Nisqually River valley, and Tacoma Power has been responsive, but due to the license and physical limitations, Tacoma Power cannot prevent flooding 40 river miles downstream of the project."

The agency added that FERC "should not rely upon the Nisqually Project to eliminate downstream flooding. The best protection from flood on the Nisqually River is to build away from areas susceptible to flood."

While the dam produces hydroelectricity, it is not equipped to conduct large-scale flood reduction.

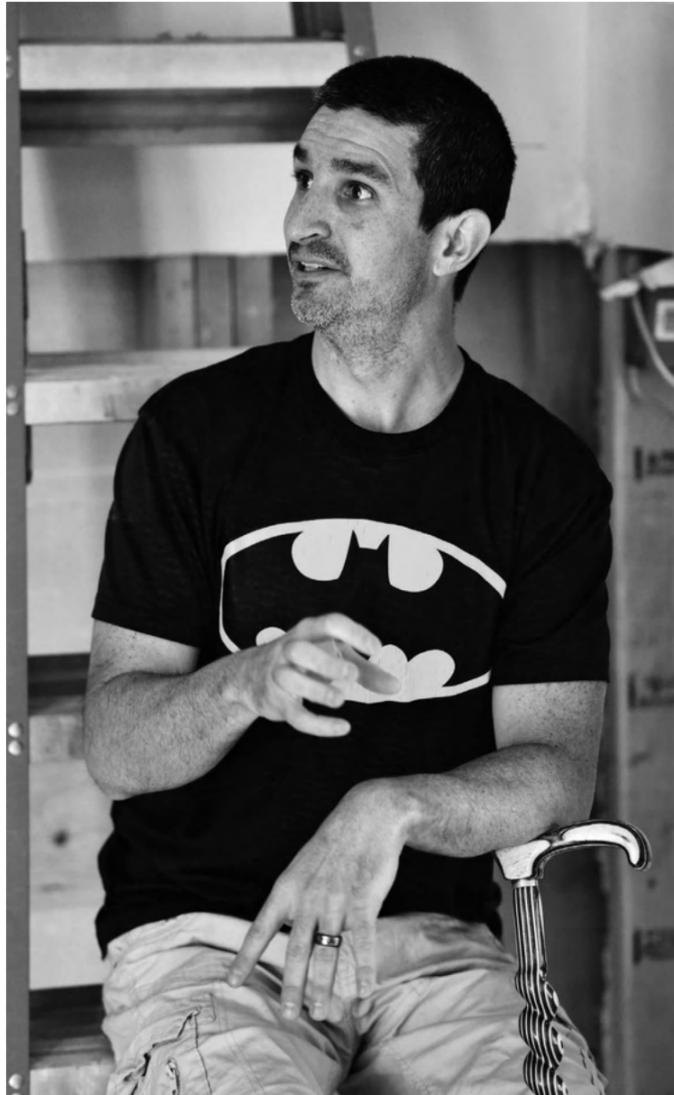
"All of that is double talk," Bridwell said, responding to Tacoma Power's claim. "They're going to use every twist of the word to justify what they did. It's up to our state representatives to look into this and read into what happened."

Water levels at Alder Lake, the reservoir above Alder Dam, are currently required to stay above 1,197 feet during the summer months and above 1,170 feet during the winter months.

The lake is deemed full at about 1,207 feet pool elevation. Daily inflows to the reservoir spiked dramatically in the days leading up to the peak, and so did daily outflows from the Nisqually River project as staff attempted to keep reservoir levels reasonable, according to documents from Tacoma Power.

During the nearly two weeks leading up to the flood incident, Tacoma Power on three separate occasions attempted to increase daily outflow amounts to address spikes in inflow.

During the first peak, on Jan. 26, inflows into the system peaked at about 6,700 cubic feet per second and Tacoma Power responded by increasing outflows to 4,000,



and then at about 5,800.

But on Feb. 6, the mean daily inflow increased substantially — more than twice the day before — to nearly 12,000 cubic feet per second.

At around Feb. 10, the level of water at the Alder Lake reservoir peaked to just 1.5 feet below its maximum permissible elevation, according to Tacoma Power's data.

Howard Glastetter, a longtime critic of Tacoma Power, also separately a member of the Nisqually River Council's citizens advisory committee, has advocated for lowering the minimum amount of water the project is required to have during the wet winter months. "All I hope for is a modicum of safety to be built into their winter time rules. It should not affect their goals or bottom line to any significant degree," Glastetter wrote in a letter to Thurston County Commissioner Gardy Edwards on the subject.

Speaking with The Nisqually

Valley News, Edwards said he believes FERC will take longer than anticipated to make its own decision on the findings. Regardless, Edwards said he expects the county to refocus on this issue once it's done addressing the larger health crisis.

"We got side-tracked because of the virus," he said. "I'm anticipating we'll still likely have that meeting once we get over this virus."

Edwards said, if the opportunity presented itself, he would be in favor of FERC amending Tacoma Power's license to lower the minimum reservoir levels.

"I think they miscalculated. It's kind of like someone who miscalculates a turn on a truck. Just because they miscalculated and hit your car, doesn't mean they're a bad person," he said. "I believe Tacoma Power does try to do the best they can — they do try to balance things out. But on occasion, there are mistakes that are made and when those mistakes are made, who's to blame?"