

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday April 23, 2020.

As of this morning, Jefferson County Public Health currently reports 28 confirmed COVID-19 cases in our county, with no new cases reported for a full two weeks. Of the 747 tested to date, 710 – or 95% – tested negative, while 4% tested positive for the presence of the virus. Nine people are now awaiting test results. These numbers reflect the shortages in availability of COVID-19 screening and represent less than 1% of our population tested.

This contrasts the statewide number of 12,494 confirmed cases, with an increase of 212 cases during a 24-hour period earlier this week.

With regard to the local results, County Health Officer Doctor Thomas Locke cited that one positive side effect of the pandemic is that people are washing their hands and that has impacted influenza. Flu season ended in March and testing for it has dropped to zero. However, a second wave of the virus could occur in the fall, corresponding with flu season, so it's not the time to ease up.

While it is unlikely that high school graduation ceremonies will occur this year, the Port Townsend School District has confirmed aspects of commencement planning, according to a report on the unofficial Jefferson County Washington news Facebook page.

Seniors can pick up their ordered graduation products from 11:15 am to 12:45 pm next Thursday, April 30, in the high school parking lot. This includes announcements and other ordered items, caps and gowns are not included.

Chimacum and Quilcene High Schools have yet to announce their graduation plans.

Throughout the COVID-19 emergency, local districts are stressing that time off from classroom instruction does not represent a vacation from learning. In a message to students Port Townsend High School principal Carrie Ehrhardt sought to dispel the myth that students who do nothing will still receive credit for their spring semester classes. And without this credit, students of any grade may need to make up this credit at a later date or not graduate when they expected.

Teachers are conducting Zoom-based classes and holding on line office hours, so an effective system is in place, according to the district.

Lots of food news today.

The Jefferson County Public Health recently conducted sanitation audits of all twenty nine grocery stores throughout the county, providing operational guidelines for staying open during the COVID-19 emergency. This includes establishing a hand washing station at entry which customers are required to use. Six-foot spacing increments, one-way aisles and plexiglass screens are safety measures that you have probably seen already.

Of the 29 stores visited, two received exemplary remarks while some others were not practicing good sanitation and social distancing practices, according to a press release, and were sent a follow up letter.

The audit included the larger chain stores and small convenience stores. Of the 29 stores visited, two received exemplary remarks for their sanitation practices. While some of the smaller stores were implementing changes such as curbside pickup and the installation of physical barriers, they weren't always practicing good sanitation or social distancing. To this end, the health department provided information on where they could obtain community-made masks and information on how to make sanitizing and disinfecting solutions.

The primary purpose for doing these was to understand what we need to do to help grocery stores and to understand the barriers to implementing social distancing and enhanced sanitation/disinfection, according to a department spokesperson. The county declined to provide the specific names of the stores which were recognized as as exemplary or cited as needing help.

The Uptown Port Townsend Farmer's Market is opening this weekend. In a newsletter, market director Amanda Milholland said this year's market will have a different appearance than in years past. Fifteen different vendors will participate, spread over a single block set ten feet apart from each other. The new market will include hand washing stations along with capacity limits and controlled entry/exit points.

Many of the vendors will take bank cards, unlike previous years when card holders were required to purchase market tokens. These tokens, which Milholland said are safer than cash, will still be available to accommodate vendors who do not have the required bank card hardware.

During this time, the Farmers Market abandons its role as a community meeting place. Instead, it becomes a place where people can purchase quality local food and support its growers.

The market operates from 9 am to noon for the duration of the emergency. The Chimacum and Port Townsend Wednesday markets are scheduled to open respectively in June and July.

And the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce has posted a handy directory on its website, listing 53 local restaurants that are now open for takeout businesses. The list, which you can print out and put on the refrigerator, classifies the restaurants by type; including phone numbers, hours of operation and whether it is a takeout or curbside delivery operation.

For the full list go to the chamber's website: <https://www.jeffcountychamber.org/food-service-options>

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at five PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at KPTZ.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.