

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, July 7, 2020.

Aldrich's market won't be gone for long, as the uptown Port Townsend market and community mainstay is under new ownership with tentative plans to reopen in the Fall.

Aldrich's closed at the end of April, citing a dwindling business, competition from other stores, and of course the pandemic as factors.

The market was first opened in 1896 by Port Townsend resident Clark Aldrich, weathering changing locations, different owners and two fires. All subsequent owners have kept the Aldrich's name, which is evocative of past times for long term Port Townsend residents and comforting to new arrivals.

The new owners, siblings Yos, Rachel and Christa Lichtenberg, are now overseeing the reconstruction of the space. For example, replacing the solid balcony wall with a more-appropriate-to-Port-Townsend metalwork frame. The 15,000 square foot space will be reconfigured to accommodate the COVID-19 world, with wider aisles, areas that accommodate social distancing, and transforming the deli into a prepared food department that expands grab and go options.

The upstairs, representing one third of the total space, will retain its identity as a community meeting space, again accommodating social distancing practices.

Of premium importance to many of us, the sushi bar will reopen, although it will be situated downstairs.

There is a business plan, but it takes second place to a values and vision statement that places community above profit. The new owners hope to build a two-way trust with the community, creating a space where a customer leaves the store with more joy than when they came in, to quote the vision statement.

This is a blueprint for a business to be done differently, they say. There are many different models but nothing that exists with the same balance of retail and community involvement.

Tangibly, Aldrich's could offer private branding of wine or health and beauty products. And while the new owners expect the market to be sustainable, they "can't approach the space with the right spirit if we are overly obsessed with the bottom line," according to Rachel Lichtenberg.

The market will eventually employ about 25 people, with about half returning from the store's previous incarnation. The opening date is projected for September, but there are no promises at this point.

The country is experiencing a severe spike in COVID-19 cases, with some locations reporting new cases that double in a matter of days or increase by several hundred thousand. Jefferson County has ridden its own spike over the last two weeks, with a 25 percent increase in cases.

Looking at the numbers themselves, however, it's not quite as grim. We now have 41 cases, up from 33 two weeks ago. The increase is attributed to the reopening of services, along with pre-surgery testing that discovers asymptomatic cases. And part of the latest increase was determined as out of county, originating from an outbreak on the UW campus in Seattle.

The 30-to-39 and 70-to-79 age groups have seen the largest jump, both increasing from five to eight. The age group with the largest number of cases are in their sixties, with twelve, although only one new case in that group was reported over the last two weeks.

The rate of positive cases is also low, with 1.2 percent of 3,410 cases showing these results. As of this morning, 52 people are awaiting testing results.

And today marks the beginning of the statewide no-mask, no-service mandate for businesses. Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke said that people who do not wear masks will now face limited options as to what they can do and where they can go. And while anti-maskers have turned the issue into a political or liberty based statement, Locke says there is no constitutional right to spread the virus to other people. More bluntly, he said a mask is not a political statement, it's an IQ test.

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