

## MLB free agents have fewer games to impress

SPORTS, 1B

# Statesman Journal

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## Service agencies see spike in need

### Helping others more in demand during coronavirus pandemic

**Connor Radnovich** Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Salem-area organizations that assist people experiencing homelessness, escaping domestic violence or needing help with rent or mortgage payments have seen a surge in demand over the past four months.

Coupled with new protocols to maintain social distance, the increase in need has required agencies to adjust

how they distribute aid and interact with the communities they serve.

It also has forced local agencies to cooperate with each other like never before, with weekly (instead of monthly) meetings, proactive sharing of resources, collaboration on cases and unprecedented streamlining of services.

"We need innovative approaches to address Salem's challenges," said

See **SERVICE**, Page 3A



The purpose of Union Gospel Mission's men's and women's shelters in Salem and Keizer is to protect health and well-being. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE



Wearing a protective mask, Siena Farmer trims the edge of a lawn in Dallas during the 50 Yard Challenge, a nationwide service drive to help senior citizens and others that has become more needed during the coronavirus pandemic.

PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

## GAINING MOW-MENTUM

### Dallas girl trims lawns for free for people in need



**Forward This**  
Capi Lynn  
Salem Statesman Journal  
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Siena Farmer and her mom lifted the lawn mower into the back of their pickup on a Saturday in May, drove into town, and didn't get home until late afternoon.

The 10-year-old mowed 12 lawns that day to help neighbors in need in Dallas, and she's never been so tired, other than maybe a day spent at Disneyland.

It was all part of the "50 Yard Challenge," a program that inspires boys and girls to make a difference in

their communities — one lawn at a time.

Nearly 1,200 kids across the United States and seven other countries have taken on the challenge, but only around 50 have completed it so far.

Siena is one of the first in Oregon to do so, along with a girl in Lebanon.

Their reward will be a visit from Rodney A. Smith Jr., the mastermind of the program who promises a new lawn mower, weed eater and leaf blower to anyone who signs up for the challenge and mows 50 lawns free for their elderly, disabled, single parent and veteran neighbors.

Smith personally delivers the rewards, too. He's making the 2,500-mile

See **DALLAS GIRL**, Page 4A



Siena Farmer of Dallas accepted the 50 Yard Challenge in October 2019.

## Sen. Wyden stresses safety in fire training

**Virginia Barreda** Salem Statesman Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said his visit to a Salem training academy Sunday reinforced the importance of the federal government in providing resources — such as personal protective equipment — to frontline workers.

During a visit with Oregon National Guard troops training to fight wildfires, Wyden discussed the challenges and safety needs in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) began hosting training Saturday for about 400 citizen-soldiers and citizen-aiirmen in the National Guard in case they're needed to combat wild-fire this year.

The training, which extends through Friday, is the same required of all public and private wildland firefighters and includes classroom, hands-on and live-fire elements.

With the recent spikes in COVID-19 cases across the country, Wyden said there is "no question" there could be some challenges in getting additional PPE for Oregon, but told the trainees he is committed to making the state's needs known to those "back east."

Last week, Wyden announced co-sponsorship of the COVID-19 as a Presumptive Disease in Wildland Firefighters Act, which protects wildland firefighters during the coronavirus pandemic.

If a firefighter contracts the virus while serving this fire season, the bill ensures a presumption that it was contracted in the line of duty to allow eligibility for worker's compensation benefits. The legislation also requires firefighters to be tested for COVID-19 before beginning work this fire season.

On Sunday, one trainee told Wyden she has the ability to bring her own masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, in addition to those provided by the academy staff.

See **WYDEN**, Page 6A

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#### USA TODAY

**A familiar illness:** Survey says one-third in U.S. knows someone who has been sick with coronavirus. **8A**

#### Coronavirus updates

The Oregon Health Authority reported two new deaths Sunday, raising the state's death toll to 234. **2A**

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# Service

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Stephen Goins, transitional programs director at Northwest Human Services. “This is actually steering us toward innovation and we’re seeing the benefits of those innovative approaches.”

“It’s probably the exact thing this community needs to address the chronically homeless population,” he said.

## New way of thinking could extend beyond pandemic

Long-standing procedures and protocols at local service agencies were upended over the past four months.

At Northwest Human Services, that meant being more proactive about connecting with homeless people in need of health care and filling new roles in the community.

“Coming out of this, the work we do will evolve and adopt some of these new ways getting into contact with people who need health care,” Goins said.

To provide health care to the homeless, staff members from Northwest Human Services are now going out into camps and on the street instead of just having them come to the clinic.

This has provided them with the opportunity to meet people who wouldn’t normally come forward for care, and certainly would not during the pandemic, Goins said.

But getting in touch with these people is just the first step — local agencies also have to send them to where they need to go.

This has been challenging in the era of COVID-19, Goins said. It’s common for affordable housing to be a barrier, for example, but now there are issues getting someone to the DMV or Social Security Office.

At its West Salem Clinic, Northwest Human Services became the primary location for coronavirus testing for first responders, shelter staff and people seeking shelter. Entirely new intake procedures have been developed to test homeless people and those interacting with them so the virus doesn’t take hold in that community.

A few weeks ago, Northwest Human Services obtained a rapid testing machine, which allows them to get results in 20 minutes. However, tests are still limited.

Major changes have also been instituted at the HOAP and HOST program locations.

Whereas in the past it would not be uncommon for there to be 60 people in one location seeking services, Goins said, now only one person is allowed in at a time. For people looking for showers, a schedule was created and time slots are assigned daily.

While clunky at first, Goins said everyone has adapted to the new protocols.

Changes occurred inside the buildings as well. Goins said they installed new air purifiers and ultraviolet lights in the air conditioning units to help disinfect. Masks are mandatory indoors at all times and some offices have been converted to work spaces to maintain physical distancing.

“We all had to think more strategically and move in a more aggressive fashion and figure out new ways of doing things,” Goins said.

## Pandemic pressures shift in focus

Over the past few months, about \$10 million in new funding has been directed toward the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency for emergency pandemic response.

However, that money comes with additional expectations that could pull the agency away from one of its core missions — trying to direct people out of homelessness.

“That’s not funding the work that we’re already doing,” said executive director Jimmy Jones. “We’ve always been there and ready to provide those emergency services, but the scope of this is much different.”

As originally created 53 years ago, the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency was designed to promote self-sufficiency and guide people out of homelessness. Over the past decade or so, the agency has increasingly taken on the additional role of providing emergency services, Jones said.

These services include paying rent or utilities on a short term basis so that people dealing with housing instability can remain in their homes.

The ongoing economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has thrown more families into that category — on the brink of homelessness.

“We’re anticipating an enormous amount of housing instability,” along with increases in poverty, homelessness and mental health issues, Jones said.

So, there is an expectation that they agency expand its efforts to keep people in their homes through actions such as rental assistance. To that end, the agency has about \$5 million in federal money to spend by Dec. 30.

However, that money can’t be spent on anything else, and if it isn’t spent it disappears.

“The population that’s gotten lost in this conversation are the people that were already homeless,” Jones said.

Jones said there are also concerns that funds will be moved from homeless services to prevention services as the pandemic continues.

The agency could also be asked to look for more and larger shelter space for the homeless in the age of social distancing. More money spent on shelters means less money to spend on housing services.

Jones said they are also involved in outreaching to the homeless community, assisting with contact tracing, providing camping equipment and coordinating meals.

“The scope of our work has just exploded in a lot of ways,” Jones said. “If the needs of the community are great, we have to be willing to carry that load regardless of how uncomfortable it might be at times.”

## Church-run programs expand

Salem’s camping ban in Wallace Marine Park and Cascades Gateway Park was suspended by the city’s coronavirus emergency declaration, which sent dozens more homeless people into the parks.

In conjunction, Church at the Park doubled the number of meals it provides at Cascades Gateway Park, from one meal, three days per week to six days per week.

Volunteers serve around 60-75 meals per day. But instead of a traditional food line, social distancing guidelines mean each meal is individually boxed and passed out.



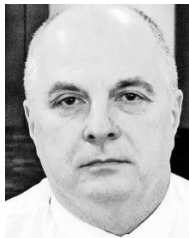
Goins



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**Keldon Thompson of Northwest Human Services looks at cabinetery as part of Good360 in 2016 at the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley’s warehouse in Salem.** STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

The food comes from eight partner churches in the area and semiweekly pick-ups from the Marion Polk Food Share.

“The need was just going to be growing exponentially,” said DJ Vincent, founder of Church at the Park. “We wanted those folks to have at least a meal a day to meet their basic human need.”

The church also began a new sanitation program with input from the homeless community after the pandemic began. Entitled “Cash for Trash,” the church hands out large yellow trash bags to individuals on Friday each week, and then anyone who turns in a full bag the following Friday receives a \$10 gift card to Walmart.

About 160 people participate each week. “It is definitely helping with the general sanitation of the park and people’s camps, as well as people seem very motivated to show up every week with the bag of trash,” Vincent said.

Church at the Park started on Jan. 1 a “safe parking” program, which allows people living out of their cars a place to park for the night. After the pandemic started, the city gave them clearance to expand that program to now five other churches.

Cars stay in the lots from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. There are trash services and portable toilets provided.

Church programs are donation-based, and Vincent said the pandemic has already grown the 2020 budget to \$80,000 — \$20,000 more than for the entirety of last year.

He attributes that to the fact that there isn’t as much happening in the city right now.

“It actually hasn’t been hard for us to receive support, both from churches and from other individuals,” Vincent said. “As long as the need is clear and high, then we probably won’t have (any trouble).”

## Domestic violence shelter ‘inundated’

Staff at the Center for Hope and Safety began preparing for the pandemic in January when the coronavirus was still largely contained within China. They made purchases of disinfectant spray and masks before those items would begin flying off the shelves weeks later.

But they were not prepared for the rise in people fleeing domestic violence and in need of shelter when lockdown orders went into place.

“We were inundated. We had everyone needing emergency shelter,” said Jayne Downing, executive director of the Center for Hope and Safety, a program serving survivors of domestic violence. “Sheltering in place with an abuser is not safe.”

The center’s confidential shelter was not sufficiently large enough while also observing social distancing guidelines, so they expanded to temporary housing. At the peak, 14 additional families were being sheltered in temporary locations.

All told, the Center saw a 35 percent increase in shelter nights for March through June compared to the same period last year. That rate was as high as 83 percent in March.

Families are also staying in the shelter for longer than in previous times. Downing attributed that to the ongoing economic crisis which makes finding a job and permanent housing more difficult.

Other Oregon shelters have been forced to shut down because of the economic and public health impacts of the pandemic, leading to the Center receiving calls from across the state as they devised ways to remain open.

“If we’re not a resource, what is going to be a resource,” Downing said. “So we just put into place all the precautions we could.”

Downing explained that the pandemic aggravated preexisting domestic violence situations and escalated new ones as stress and fear took hold. Lockdown guidelines allowed abusers more opportunity to isolate their victims, and some abusers threatened to intentionally expose the family to the virus, Downing said.

Under normal times, victims often don’t know where to turn as these situations develop, but the pandemic also cut off the possibility of living with nearby family.

“So, programs like ours become more critical,” Downing said.

## Less shelter space, but new location on horizon

For Dan Clem, Union Gospel Mission of Salem’s executive director, the purpose of their men’s and women’s shelters in Salem and Keizer, respectively, are to protect health and well-being.

The pandemic has not changed those goals, he said. It simply added coronavirus to the list of health risks the shelters are trying to keep people safe from. But to achieve that, they removed 25 beds from the men’s shelter and 20 from the women’s.

“The focus had to shift with so much attention on safety and health, and that’s built a backlog of men and women trying to get into the shelters,” Clem said. “COVID in a shelter is something we’ve been able to prevent and we can’t get this wrong.”

To maintain social distancing, UGM is not utilizing their dining area to full capacity, reduced at the men’s shelter from 70 people at a time to around 28. The line

**“The scope of our work has just exploded in a lot of ways. If the needs of the community are great, we have to be willing to carry that load regardless of how uncomfortable it might be at times.”**

**Jimmy Jones**

Executive director, Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency

stretches down the street and meal times last much longer as only a handful of people can be served at a time.

But there is change on the horizon. Clem said the new men’s shelter — scheduled to be completed by mid-March 2021 — could feed 150 people at one time, and that is taking social distancing requirements into consideration.

The bigger space could help with staffing as well. Since the pandemic began, UGM has stopped allowing volunteers into the shelters, relying on staff to take on multiple roles in some cases.

These roles include multiple sessions of chapel per day, both to keep appropriate physical distance and because, Clem said, interest has grown in the past few months.

“It’s a time where the world is in fear and chapel becomes all that more important,” he said.

Clem added that though staff are stretched thin, having more time with the people staying at the shelters has built stronger relationships.


Another unexpected bright spot: During a normal springtime in the shelter, cold and flu outbreaks are frequent. This year, because everyone was wearing a mask and cleaning surfaces with disinfectant, there were zero incidents of cold or flu.

“We’re about saving lives,” Clem said. “We’re actually a little healthier and a little closer.”

Reporter Connor Radnovich covers the Oregon Legislature and state government. Contact him at [cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com) or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich.

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