

You're listening to KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. This is Lily Haight telling you about what's new in this week's Port Townsend Leader.

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As of March 31st, there were 4,896 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Washington, with a total of 195 deaths in the state. Jefferson County now has 17 confirmed cases, but officials await the results of 63 tests still. Jefferson County is expecting to receive two more ventilators—the machines required to help patients experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19 keep breathing. As of now, Jefferson Healthcare only has four of these machines.

Twenty percent of people who contract COVID-19 will need hospital care, according to public health officer Tom Locke. Around 6% will need intensive care and mechanical ventilation.

With the hope of meeting the challenge of a global pandemic head-on, Jefferson Healthcare has spent the last few months transforming the hospital, located on Sheridan Street in Port Townsend, into a facility equipped to handle the “surge” of coronavirus patients that could come in the future.

They are working to double their capacity, by limiting elective surgeries and turning those now unused wards into extra ICU rooms for COVID-19 patients.

In addition, the Department of Emergency Management has secured a facility to use as a temporary morgue.

They are also continuing to request more Personal Protective Equipment for healthcare workers.

“We will prepare to face this and get through this,” said Joe Mattern, Chief Medical Officer at Jefferson Healthcare. “I would also ask the community to do what you can from a standpoint of spacing and social distancing and staying healthy. I would love this to be the greatest intellectual exercise that any of us have taken in our careers.”

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Jefferson Community Foundation has already rolled out their first round of grants to local nonprofits who are on the front lines of helping community members deal with economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

As of March 27, 121 people have donated to the Jefferson Community Foundation's COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, raising \$142,000.

Last Friday, a grant team considered all grant requests distributed \$32,750.

The first round of grants will go to :

- Dove House Advocacy Services to establish a Rapid Response Rental Assistance Fund dedicated to helping people who, without immediate financial assistance, might otherwise fall into homelessness or long-term debt from which they could not recover.
- The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of East Jefferson County to expand emergency financial assistance for individuals and families.
- The Benji Project to teach stress relief, connection and coping practices as well as mindfulness and self-compassion for isolated teens twice weekly through June 2020.
- The Jefferson County Food Bank Network to purchase produce and stackable boxes, making it easier to accommodate drive-up food pick-ups.
- And the Quilcene and Brinnon Weekend Nutrition Program to increase their weekend food program for youth in response to a recent 17% increase in users.

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April is Native Plant Appreciation Month. While Fort Worden and other state parks are closed to the public—citizens are still permitted to walk inside the park, as long as they remain a safe six feet away from other walkers.

To celebrate the month, take a walk through Fort Worden, Cappy's Trails or visit the Kah Tai Prairie Reserve to spot some of the plants that are unique to our area, including blue-eyed Marys, Douglas' grasswidow, hot pink salmonberry blossoms and elegant white Indian plum flowers blooming along the trail.

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The fate of the annual Rhododendron Festival is up in the air. The annual Rhody Run 12k race was canceled for the first time in its almost 42-year history.

The festival, however, is not associated with the Rhody Run or the Port Townsend Marathon Association. Festival association president Lori Morris said while the Rhododendron Festival is still scheduled to take place in the second full week in May, they will decide whether or not to cancel at the end of April.

Morris said the newly crowned Rhody Royalty are devastated as the Daffodil Festival in Puyallup and the Irrigation Festival in Sequim, where they were supposed to make their first regional appearances, have been canceled.

If there are still restrictions on large gatherings at the end of May, the Rhody festival might have to be rescheduled. Morris said if the festival must be pushed back later into the summer it will be hard to find a date that does not conflict with another local or regional event.

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The Leader is celebrating National Poetry Month by publishing poems by local writers in each weekly edition of the paper this April. Check out this week's poems on page 18 of the paper. If you want to submit a poem to be printed, email [lhaight@ptleader.com](mailto:lhaight@ptleader.com).

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For these stories and more, check out this week's edition of the Leader on newsstands now. This is Lily Haight, Leader news reporter, on KPTZ 91.9 FM.