

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, January 14, 2021.

Two new occurrences of COVID-19 in Jefferson County were reported yesterday, a female in her 30s and a male in his fifties. Both were presumed to be out of county exposures. There are currently 260 confirmed cases with 14 people awaiting test results. Two Jefferson County residents have died from the disease.

Beginning today, Jefferson County residents who are 85 and older are being scheduled for vaccinations, taking place in a pop-up facility adjacent to Manresa Castle next to the hospital. Vaccines will also be administered to the same age group next week at the Tri-Area Pharmacy in Port Hadlock.

Due to unpredictable vaccine availability, Jefferson Healthcare has partnered with Jefferson County Public Health to identify an age-band strategy that brings forward the frailest, most vulnerable members of our community first. Jefferson County is the oldest county in the state; 8000 of our residents (approximately one-third of the population) are over the age of 70. Once a regular and predictable vaccine allocation schedule is established the hospital will establish a schedule for other authorized age groups.

Those receiving vaccinations will still need to wear masks and social distance for the time being. While we can't really tell how the vaccine is working, it is reported that people feel an immense sense of relief after the shot, so long as they don't have an immediate negative physical reaction. To that end, those vaccinated are kept on site for several minutes for observation.

As we reported on Tuesday, Don's Pharmacy is now under new management, now owned by Patrick O'Donnell, who owns and operates four other pharmacies along with a prescription delivery business. Customers shouldn't expect any immediate changes, as the name will continue and former owner Don Hoglund will still be on the job, from time to time.

O'Donnell told KPTZ that Don's is one of the few independent pharmacies that is still successful. He said that any eventual changes will be incremental efficiency improvements, including automation and delivery. He also will upgrade pharmacy operations, and eventually provide vaccinations. He won't be offering COVID-19 vaccinations this year but would do so in the future, as they could become a yearly thing.

Over the past few years small pharmacies have been challenged when they are not designated as preferred sources by insurance providers. The intention is to drive people toward chain stores, according to pharmacists interviewed by KPTZ. O'Donnell said he is in a better position than Hoglund to negotiate preferred plans, thereby allowing Don's existing customers to stay loyal without paying more for drugs than at large chains.

While no one can object to increased efficiency and delivery options, some community members are up in arms about the possibility of the permanent closure of the soda fountain. O'Donnell said he hasn't made up his mind to reopen once COVID-19 is less of an issue, but adds that the soda fountain had lost money for some time. He is open to reopening, but it has to be a profitable business. Soda fountains and pharmacies were once hand in hand; Don's is one of the last pharmacies to include a restaurant in the back. But things change, as the food served in such restaurants is often high in salt and cholesterol. As for the good old days, O'Donnell reminds us that all pharmacies sold cigarettes 30 years ago.

O'Donnell said he'll be spending time in Don's, and was in the store this week.

As many as 4,000 PUD customers were in the dark as a result of Tuesday night's windstorm. Today the power is restored in all but three locations on Airport Road, according to PUD spokesman Will O'Donnell. Three-fourths of the customers were switched back on by Wednesday morning, but it took until 6pm for the others to be restored. O'Donnell said the delay occurred because the outages were spread around the county rather than in concentrated locations. The PUD is now replacing a power pole, after which time the three remaining houses can light up again.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased isolation for people in long term care facilities, so the Olympic Area Agency on Aging is recruiting people to become pen pals with these residents. As this brightens the residents' day, this will bring back the forgotten joy of letter writing for both sides. For more information, contact Amber Garrotte at amber.garrotte2@dshs.wa.gov.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.