

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with news and commentary for Thursday April 9, 2020.

After a spike in cases over the weekend, Jefferson County Department of Public Health reports the same COVID 19 infection cases as two days ago: Twenty seven local cases, 18 are designated as in-county exposures while nine are presumed out of county exposures.

The department reports 53 new tests since Tuesday, with 18 patients expecting the results. The tests have come back with a 4.3% positive response, according to the agency's web site. There is still a shortage of testing kits, with only the most symptomatic called in for testing.

While there are no reported COVID 19 deaths in Jefferson County, the community suffered a significant casualty with the announced closure of Aldrich's Market in Uptown Port Townsend. Owners Scott and Robin Rogers yesterday announced the intention to close at the end of January.

The closure was attributed to the business losses resulting from the COVID 19 outbreak, although the market has been financially unstable in recent years.

The owners announced the closure yesterday on the store's Facebook page, expressing gratitude for the support from our customers, friends, and neighbors. To quote: "We opened our doors, and you made this your pantry, your office, your community center. We have enjoyed serving you, and treasured being a part of your lives, your families."

The Facebook posting immediately drawing 66 message of support. Some of these came from people who have frequented the store all of their lives. In one post, a local woman recalled visiting the market with her grandfather for a slab of baloney in the late 1960s as part of a regular family walking tour. Many people shared their own Aldrich's stories, reflecting its role as a community meeting place and a source of healthy, organic food.

Scott Rogers told KPTZ that the decision to close is permanent and irrevocable. When asked if he would sell the business he said he would give it away, as it isn't worth anything at this point. So someone could swoop in and save the day, but current economic conditions make that unlikely.

The store employs up to 28 people. Rogers said that he will now need to get a "real" job, working to repay the debt incurred when he bought the store in 2017.

Like all statewide schools the Port Townsend School District will not reopen this school year, but the administration believes it can meet student needs through distance learning. The district is looking to complete the school year successfully on time, as there is no funding available for summer instruction, according to school superintendent John Polm. Also in the mix is the idea that school might not reopen as usual in the fall, should the pandemic continue.

School Board Chair Jennifer James Wilson told KPTZ that the district is doing its part to get technology into the hands of students who do not have access, and hopes to establish several WiFi hotspots in school and library parking lots to supply broadband connections for those who do not have access. Wilson said that the district's

advantage is its size, as it is small enough that it can reach every local child in the district. She said that the loss of structure and socialization is an obstacle to effective learning.

Polm acknowledged there could be a motivation deficit on the part of some students, but told us that many students are successfully engaging teachers through the use of online teleconferencing software.

As for graduation, it is likely that the planned June fifth ceremony will not occur as usual. Polm said the district is planning some commemoration on the actual date, with an in-person event taking place at a later time.

Normally, this time of the year finds people lining up to run for office, contemplating the call of public service. COVID-19 has changed priorities., but democracy marches on. In Jefferson County, there is the opportunity this year to run for two county commissioner seats and Superior Court Judge.

The big political news is that District 2 commissioner David Sullivan is retiring after four terms. One person – Planning Commissioner Lorna Smith – has announced for the seat and has already raised nearly six thousand dollars in contributions. This amount is unprecedented in such a race, according to Jefferson County Democratic Party official Bruce Cowan.

District 1 commissioner Kate Dean is running for a second term, with no announced opposition.

Jefferson County Republican Party representative Lynn Hizey told KPTZ that the party will send out a recruitment letter in the next few days, to encourage people to step forward.

Candidate filing takes place the week of May 11, with many political hopefuls waiting until then to announce their intentions.

Unrelated to COVID-19, the state of Washington is refining its vote-wa page where candidates can file electronically without the need to visit the auditor's office.

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 dot org.

This is Charlie Bermant with some of today's news. Thank you for listening to KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend.