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Handling the coviissitudes of life

The real is real
Local real estate market is red hot

More faces, more cases
Covid cases spike in conjunction with visitation

The book of hygenesis

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Saturday, July 11, 2020 FREE Vol. 18, No. 28

By Hite

Like all hospitals around the country, Mammoth Hospital has not been immune to the financial impact of COVID-19,” said Melanie Van Winkle, CFO for Mammoth Hospital, in an email to The Sheet.

“In mid-March, we cancelled our elective surgeries/procedures/tests in order to preserve our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and prepare our facilities related issues. Another thing we were able to do is increase our PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) in order to handle new confirmed cases in Mono County, putting the total at 49 since March. Frievalt called the situation a “delicate balance,” noting that “As you reopen, the standard work of business and government starts to increase too. A lot of my EOC staff is stretched a little thinner between requirements on their day jobs.”

As counties in Southern California begin to shutdown businesses like bars and eliminate indoor seating at restaurants, Disneyland opened to the general public on Thursday, July 9, after a four month hiatus. In addition, the federal government is asking that all schools be open to students come the fall, a prospect that has school boards, teachers, and parents wary of the potential pitfalls of reopening those facilities.

In spite of the spikes and new concerns, Mono County has been packed with tourists from all over the state and region. The county has opted to keep the Emergency Operations Center up and running in some capacity while beginning the process of diverting specific resources, such as the community support branch, back into the county’s overarching control.

Mammoth Lakes Fire Chief Frank Frievall, representing the EOC at Tuesday’s Mono Board of Supervisors meeting, reported that the county had seen a uptick in Covid cases. From July 2 through July 9, there were 9 new confirmed cases in Mono County, putting the total at 49 since March. Frievall called the situation a “delicate balance,” noting that “As you reopen, the standard work of business and government starts to increase too. A lot of my EOC staff is stretched a little thinner between requirements on their day jobs.”

The Hospital also created protocols in order to preserve symptoms, work in “high risk environments,” or have been in contact with someone who has been exposed to get tested. As counties in Southern California begin to shutdown businesses like bars and eliminate indoor seating at restaurants, Disneyland opened to the general public on Thursday, July 9, after a four month hiatus.

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Rick was the one, by the way, who championed the ice rink at Mammoth Creek Park before its first death in 2005.

Anyway, there was a point several years back where Rick took me aside (we had long buried our differences and settled into a friendly mutual respect of former combatants) and said it was time for me to retire the “Fifty Center” moniker that I had tagged my competition (The Mammoth Times) with. Continuing to use the term was just ... overkill, he said. I had won that battle. To use the term any further diminished me. I knew he was right. And I felt a little embarrassed that I hadn’t recognized it earlier. And was grateful that an elder cared enough to set me straight.

There’s a particular line in Jackson Browne’s “Running on Empty” that’s always haunted me just because it’s such a crisp synopsis of the transition from childhood dreams to the cold reality of adulthood.

I look around for the friends that I used to turn to to pull me through Looking into their eyes, I see them running too We're all running these days, for sure. Although ... in the song, you get the sense that everyone is running for himself, whereas I think what I’ve appreciated most over the past several months is the fraternal spirit and gallows humor that has bonded not only the local business community, but the larger community as a whole.

There have been a few instances over the past few months where people have given me checks. Unsolicited. One of those donations was outrageously generous. The person handed me the check and said, “You probably think I expect something for this. I don’t. Just take it. Take care of your family.” I could have cried. I may have. But I won't admit it to you. And then there was a client of mine. We made an egregious mistake on his ad. This was awhile back. The mistake was so egregious (we had run a 2016 ad instead of the 2020 version) that I didn’t charge him at all that month. This was pre-Covid. Humbling. A few weeks later, the client sends me a check anyway for the full amount. Even more humbling. That was Dave Talsky of Mammoth Mountaininering, Alpine Approach and the Gear Exchange in Bishop. Straight up, stand up guy. I didn’t deserve it.

I had my battles during the early years with Rick Wood. If anyone thinks I give them a hard time, he/she should speak with Rick Wood. Rick got the hardest time. Because he risked the most, reached the most. At the time (mid-2000s), the Town of Mammoth and Mammoth Mountain had a very audacious vision. 333,000 annual enplanements at the airport. 60,000 people in town at one time. Heated sidewalks, even! I didn’t agree with it. Fought it. The Advocates for Mammoth fought it. And the Great Recession rendered a lot of things moot. But dammit, he did put himself out there. He had a point of view. I sure hope whomever runs for Mammoth’s Town Council in 2020 can say the same.

Everyone in the office gets a shot at this caption.

Lunch: I’ll ride with MLT on this one. “Where ‘no way’ is never far away.”
Page: Is this the Bridge to Terabithia?
Hite: They told us we wouldn’t have to pay tolls if we came this way.

For a subscription, contact Lunch at his above e-mail address, or call the office. Issues are mailed out bi-weekly. Cost is $75/year.
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We’re proud to have provided over $20,000 in scholarships to recent graduates for academic accomplishments and community spirit in Lee Vining, June Lake, Bridgeport and Mammoth.

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- Laurene Archbold (’62)
- Dina Baran (’79)
- George Schmidtner (in memorium, ’64)
- Wayne and Marge Beaver (’61)
- Ken Beck (’65)
- Patty Cundy Beaver (’74)
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- Harry Kellogg (’53)
- Penny Kellogg (Wheeler, ’62)
- Eugene Keyser (’51)
- John Loque (’63)
- Cindy Logan (Oldfield, ’72)
- Mariah McCullough (’92)
- Barry McPherson (’60)
- Scott Nelson (’65)
- Jennifer Mitchell (’87)
- Tracy Mitchell (’89)
- Roseanne Morgan (’69)
- Susan Morrow (’75)
- Jorge Murguia (’14)
- John Murphy (’50)
- Pam Murphy (Wheeler, ’59)
- Tom Petrick (’55)
- David Parkhurst (’72)
- Fred Parish (’67)
- Thehma Petrie (’64)
- Steve Pico (’75)
- David Riley (’70)
- Kristen Rogers (Graham, ’82)
- Lori Reo (’96)
- Lisa Santier-Bauer (’76)
- Sue Small Fontana (’65)
- Lee K. Spencer (’63)
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- Melissa Stricklin-Silman (’92)
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- Eric Streich (’91)
- Tracy Wooten Tisdale (’67)
- Tom Wheeler (’56)
- Dan Willette English (’82)
- Michael Wilson (’79)
- Curt Vaughn (’65)
- Memorial for Ramona Steigman (’91)
- Memorial for Al Morgan (’53)

AND THANKS TO THESE ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS:

- Coach Joseph Pawlick
- Pam and Don Reke
- Beverly and Andy Gilmore

AND THANKS TO THESE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS FOR THEIR POSITIVE ACTIONS IN OUR COMMUNITIES:

- Stephanie Gomez (June Lake, 2022)
- Beth Trefry (Mono City, 2020)
- Abbon Cortez (Lee Vining, 2020)
- Sophie Mckee (Mammoth, 2013)
- Jodie Auer (June Lake, 2019)
- Casey McKee (Mono City, 2019)
- Rachelle Sandora (Lee Vining, 2019)
- Ryan Carle
- John Hendrick
- Larry and Alisa Mckee
- David Carle
- Terry Shaw
- Kathleen Bellomo
- Rob Roberts
- Lindsey Burch (Bridgeport, 2018)
- Charles Ceballos (Mono City, 2017)
- Jammi Romero (Lee Vining, 2015)
- Jorge Murguia (Lee Vining, 2014)
- Anne Kate Demos (Bridgeport, 2013)
- Alexia Mckee (Mammoth, 2012)
- Cristina Arzay (June Lake, 2012)
- Kyle Northington (Bridgeport, 2012)
- Nathasha McCullough (Lee Vining, 2012)
- Angela Auer (Bridgeport, 2011)
- Juan Romero (Lee Vining, 2011)

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Hold the middle

Ted,

Thank you for enunciating your current thoughts and positions vis-a-vis COVID-19, tourists, and masks. It’s always reassuring to me when somebody fights to “hold the middle ground” and makes me think that maybe the world isn’t quite as polarized as it is sometimes portrayed.

As for the right-of-way on trails, it seems to me that this could be explained by a simple lack of manners, or may just be an example of the gap between our expectations and reality. I’ve always liked the expression: “Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.” Of course, from the outside, ignorance and stupidity can look a lot alike (Here we see part of the inherent danger in judging by appearances). Having had a father who, like most of us, wore many hats over the course of his life (Dairy Farmer, Merchant Marine, High School Shop Teacher), it was his background as a Summer School Driver’s Education Teacher at the local high school that caused him to actively remove many of my opportunities for ignorance about the rules of the road. This was normally done by frequent voicing of his observations and considered professional opinions from behind the steering wheel of our ‘66 Ford Galaxy during every on-road or off-road object lesson seen through the windshield, usually followed by a lecture-like explanation of every causal and conjectural nuance that had been observed during the incident. Among these lessons was the rule that on steep roads where there is insufficient room to pass, the vehicle facing downhill must yield the right-of-way. (See California Driver Handbook, 2020 English Edition, Page 37, “On Mountain Roads”: https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/uploads/2020/06/dl600.pdf). This rule is necessitated, at least in part, by the fact that it may be harder to maintain control of one’s vehicle while backing down a mountain road, than when backing up one.

Although the physics are somewhat different when on foot, I’ve always observed this rule when hiking in our local mountains, stepping aside for traffic when headed downhill, and have seen innumerable other backpackers do the same. It may be an improper (and possibly even unconscious) extension of motor vehicle codes into our pedestrian lives to assume that this rule should apply on the trail as well, but then, just try walking on the left side of the sidewalk on Main Street and see what happens!

Anyway, thank you again for helping the “silent majority” stabilize society by holding firm in the middle. No, I’m still not a Nixon fan, never was, probably never will be, but those are unfortunate-ly still the right words in this case.

Michael House
Paradise

Nut up, Ted

Dear Editor:

What? 17-20 gunned down in Chicago, 10-15 in NY, Philadelphia, L.A. ... Lawless vandals/rioters destroying public property, torching businesses. Demands to defund police departments nationwide! The outrage from BLM (Black Lives Matter) is astonishing. Oops, there is no outrage. This violence doesn’t fit the script. It’s black people killing black people. Not a big deal to BLM.

... Omar rants on television that we have completely dismantled the “system” - that police departments have to be abolished within 5 years. Do you think maybe it’s time to nut up and let the young high school kids in this town who SO idolize BLM and Antifa know what these organizations really stand for?

NUT UP, TED

Allen Brown
Mammoth Lakes

Whose side are you on?

Dear Editor,

It is truly unfortunate that with everything else going on in the world today, it be necessary to continue to write you about the state of water management in the North Mono Basin. I am afraid that the environmental devastation that I wrote to you about throughout this year, and again this past May has continued unabated.

For the last two and a half months, several of the DeChambeau ponds have remained completely dry, as has the lower channel of Wilson Creek. May and June are crucial months for nesting birds at Mono Lake and DeChambeau, and this year’s nesting season has been decimated by the reckless and inappropriate management of these public resources. As I stated in my earlier letters, the U.S. Forest Service is not the only one to blame. Southern California Edison (SCE) and the Mono Lake Committee, along with the USFS are collectively culpable, and their implementa-
tion of a “new plan” for management between Mill and Wilson Creeks. Many local observers warned that there was potential for serious damage to existing habitat if the plan was implemented, and voiced hopes that there could be a more balanced approach to restoring Mill Creek than the one insisted on by these parties.

While the Mono Lake Committee is devoting a great deal of energy to fight the proposals for the Tioga Inn in Lee Vining, their own policies are leading to the literal elimination of some of the only ponded lagoon habitat left on Mono Lake. South Tufa, the most frequented site on Mono Lake will not be staffed by the US Forest Service this summer, despite record numbers of people visiting this famous site. Does the Mono Lake Committee care about South Tufa, or the drying out of Wilson Creek and the DeChambeau Ponds? Or are they only interested in creating and benefitting from the political frenzy they have sensationalized around the Tioga Inn, because they know it will drive their rich (and clueless) donors from the Bay Area to keep sending in the checks? Clearly they don’t actually care about the true environmental concerns facing Mono Lake anymore.

I was born and have spent most of my life in the Mono Basin. I’m not alone in my alarm and disappointment that the groups and agencies who claim to be dedicated to protecting this area are now actively aiding in and benefitting from its destruction.

Hillary Hansen Jones
Mono Lake

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Pancho and Inyo

The Inyo National Forest has selected John F “Pancho” Smith as the Acting Forest Supervisor. Pancho comes to the Inyo from the Los Padres National Forest where he is the District Ranger for the Santa Barbara and Ojai Ranger Districts.

Pancho will be at the Inyo National Forest for the next four months. Pancho started as the Forest Supervisor position on the Inyo National Forest will be filled permanently within the next several months.

“I am thrilled to be here in Bishop, working with the great employees of the Inyo National Forest and the communities within and adjacent to the forest.” Pancho said.

Drowning at Twin Lakes

On July 8, 2020, at approximately 7:50 a.m., a single fatal motor vehicle collision occurred on Twin Lakes Road approximately .8 miles west of Charlie Day Road within unincorporated Mono County. The driver is suspected to have suffered a medical event which resulted in the vehicle crashing into the Upper Twin Lake.

The driver, a 61 year old male, from Hesperia, CA, was driving a 2013 Chevrolet pick-up west on Twin Lakes Road at approximately 30-40 mph. A female passenger from Palm Springs CA, was seated in the right front seat. It appears that the driver suffered an immediate and unknown medical event. As a result, the vehicle immediately veered from the roadway, down the steep embankment and entered Upper Twin Lake. The passenger escaped the vehicle and swam to shore. The vehicle came to rest on the bottom of Upper Twin Lake approximately 75-100 feet from the shoreline at a depth of 19 feet.

The Mono County Sheriff’s Department boat unit responded and used an underwater video camera to confirm that the driver was located in the driver’s seat. Based on the family member statements, alcohol or drug intoxication do not appear to be contributory factors.

Bridgeport Police are investigating the incident. Officers on scene made appropriate notifications to CAL OES, US Forest Service, CA Dept of Fish and Wildlife and Mono County Environmental Health. Bridgeport Area personnel have established a crime scene perimeter and will maintain the perimeter until recovery efforts are completed.

No Mo’ Camping at Inyo

The Inyo National Forest is extending the closure of all group campgrounds and two remote campgrounds under a forest order closure. The closure can be terminated or extended depending on conditions.

See the Inyo National Forest website for the full list of campgrounds included in this order.

Developed recreation group camp-sites on the Inyo National Forest typically draw large groups of people, creating mass gatherings and concentrated groups of forest visitors. This results in significant management oversight, especially during the high use conditions now being experienced.

Additionally, due to lack of personnel it is necessary to close two developed campgrounds. Grandview Campground and Kennedy Meadows Campground, located in remote areas of the Inyo National Forest.

This closure is an interim measure. The Inyo National Forest will follow guidelines from the CDC, as well as state and local health departments, to ensure the safety of our employees and our visitors is a priority.

On Reserve

The Inyo National Forest continues to work to improve the virtual wilderness permit process implemented earlier this year to accommodate what have been traditionally “walk up” permits that were issued at our visitor centers. Visitor centers remain closed and are providing virtual services.

All wilderness permit reservations are made on recreation.gov. Sixty percent of the trailhead quota can be reserved six months in advance of the date of entry. The remaining forty percent of the quota (previously walk-in) is released on Mondays, two weeks in advance of the day of entry.

We are asking people not to request their permit more than fourteen days before their trips. Requests by email should allow two days for their permit to be processed. If someone needs drop box service, they must call the visitor center where the drop box is located.

We also encourage visitors to use the email option when possible.

Once the forest is contacted by inbox or by phone, a permit is issued and sent electronically with a link to our Leave No Trace video, as well as any site specific attachments and told to print the permit and carry it with them on their wilderness trip. We appreciate your patience during this transition.

Mt. Whitney permits are being handled in the same way. However, visitors will be given information on where to pick up their wag bags; depending on their itinerary. Wag bags are designed to collect human waste and dispose it effectively employing Leave No Trace Pack it Out principles in high use areas.

BLM Wants Input

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is seeking public input for the future management of the Alabama Hills near Lone Pine in Inyo County. Today’s release of an environmental assessment lays out three proposed alternatives and begins a 30-day public review period that ends on August 7, 2020.

“We welcome continued public engagement in our effort to develop a comprehensive plan for management of the area,” says Bishop Field Manager Steve Nelson. “We also look forward to completing the plan and working with the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, the local tribe, and the Lone Pine community to implement management strategies that will ensure the long-term protection, conservation, public access, and responsible use of this magnificent landscape.”

To facilitate public review and encourage public participation in the Alabama Hills planning effort, the BLM will host two virtual meetings in late July. Public meeting materials will be available on the project website: https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/1502669/570. Virtual meetings will be conducted on the following dates and times:

- Wednesday, July 22, from 2-4 p.m.
- Thursday, July 23, from 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Questions: contact Project Manager Monica Buchler at 760-872-5000.

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

In lieu of a Fourth of July parade, Mammoth Lakes held a static float contest at participating businesses. Patrons were encouraged to vote with the hashtag #mammothlakes4thofjuly on Instagram. Noodle-ly was voted the winner for this boxing match between a bowl of noodles and Covid-19 and received a $500 check from the Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce.

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BUILD THE RINK

A concerned citizen(s), apparently a hockey fan, placed signs around Mammoth Lakes on Monday morning petitioning the town to begin work on the Multi Use Facility. The signs were gone by the late afternoon.

LOCAL BRIEFS
Valentine Reserve undertaking large-scale fuel reduction project

By Page

Remember waiting for what seemed like forever to get a haircut after quarantine began? Try holding out for nearly two centuries.

After 170 years of growth, the Valentine Reserve in Mammoth Lakes is getting a much-needed trim.

Tree and underbrush clearing in the reserve’s 156-acre Valentine Camp began in June and is expected to last through until at least March of next year.

The current project targets approximately 50 acres of trees within the reserve.

The Valentine Reserve was acquired by the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1972, having been protected land since the early 1900s, and has traditionally restricted visitation to staff and graduate students performing studies in the Camp. Protecting the land for so long has resulted in a dense undergrowth of flora and smaller trees, virtually untouched by fires and industrial activity since the mid-1800s.

This constant unchecked growth created an issue for the forest’s health and also presented a fire hazard to Old Mammoth; a summary of a CEQA study reports over 900 stems per acre in some sections of the reserve, which is very, very high for Eastern Sierra Nevada mixed conifer.

Valentine Reserve Director Carol Blanchette explained the situation.

“They [trees] become water stressed and become more susceptible to things like beetle infestation,” Blanchette said, “they start to die and become a bigger fire hazard.”

Stewards at the Reserve initiated a forest health/fuel reduction project in the mid-late 2000s, with a grant from the California Fire Safe Reserve coming in 2011 to cover work on an additional 20 acres of the Reserve.

The planning for the current fuel reduction project in the Valentine Reserve began with a CAL FIRE Community Fire Prevention Grant to the tune of $506,800 in 2018.

The description of the project in the CAL FIRE grant list reads: “The Mono County Community Wildfire Protection Plan has identified that the general area of the Reserve, wildlands to the west and southwest of the community of Mammoth Lakes are identified as an area of highest priority due to the likelihood of wildfire originating in campgrounds to west, due to prevailing wind patterns, due to high fuel loading, and property values in mammoth Lakes, which are the highest in the County.”

The description concludes, “The Community Hazard rating is Extreme.”

Part of the stipulations involved in using that grant money mandates that a professional forester be brought in to do an analysis on the trees and identify those that needed to be removed.

Greg Cook of GC Forest Products, the company contracted to do the analysis and work this summer, explained that prior to identifying trees for removal, his team went through the designated acreage to identify potential archaeological sites, waterways, and areas for preservation.

Cook defined the work as having “a fairly large impact” and added that they would be reducing an average of 800 trees per acre down to about eighty trees per acre. Trees making the cut would have to have a 10-inch diameter and be taller than chest height. Anything smaller than that falls to Cook and Co’s discretion.

“It’s needed treatment for decades,” Cook said, “and some of the work being done probably wasn’t to prescription.”

For Cook and GC Forest Products, the project is a first. “A lot of these projects have gone on around us and we haven’t been involved,” he said, “we’re typically asked to come in and clean up afterwards.”

“It’s a decent project, it’s in our wheelhouse,” Cook added, “it’s something we can knock out and do a quality job in it.”

Blanchette described the process of clearing out fuel loads and enhancing forest health as “something you do over time, especially since the Valentine Reserve is literally in the town of Mammoth Lakes.”

“We don’t have the opportunity to do things like prescribed burns ... mimicking the role of fire in the forest, Blanchette said. “Because the Lakes Basin project was happening, we felt it was a good time to follow onto that project.”

Some local residents have complained about the extent of work being done in the Reserve. Piles of felled trees and clear cuts are visible from Old Mammoth Road. Cook and Blanchette repeatedly emphasized the need to reduce fuel loads in the reserve given the immediate threat those fuels present to Old Mammoth in the event of a fire.

And, Cook added, you can expect better service from his crew than from some of the local tree-trimmers.

“We’re not Edison,” Cook said, “We’re not just leaving the mess that they’ve left.”

Greg Cook
SECOND SURVEY SAYS ...

By Hite

In mid-April, Mono County Economic Development (MCED) conducted a business survey attempting to understand the initial effects of COVID-19 on the local economy. This survey, with 151 respondents, revealed some alarming numbers. At the time, only 7% of county businesses were able to operate as normal, with 45% stating they could not operate at all. According to the survey, five businesses had already closed their doors for good, with 38% of responding businesses saying that they had a month or less before they would have to do the same.

The numbers painted a dreary outlook for the Mono County economy. So ... what happened?

The Sheet recently asked Mono County Economic Development Director Alicia Vennos if there was a follow-up report. It just so happened that MCED was wrapping up a second business survey.

“The more recent survey was distributed in early June and businesses were already reopening to some degree, or preparing to reopen fully, and we received about half the response level (82 compared to 151) as the first survey,” said Vennos. “In contrast, the second survey showed that 43% of respondents had received PPP (Payment Protection Program) funding (14% had applied but were still awaiting funds/confirmation of funds), and 23% had received EIDL (Economic Injury Disaster Loan) funding.

While the first survey was conducted, Mono County, as a whole, was a ghost town. The only real business: grocery stores and to-go orders. Since then, $13 million was being injected into Mono County’s economy across 310 different businesses. That is an average PPP loan of $42,000. Most of this money went into Mammoth Lakes, $11 million into 254 different businesses with an average loan of $43,370. June Lake was the second biggest funding recipient of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans with $752,000 to 23 different businesses at an average loan of $32,700. 17 Bridgeport businesses received $588,400 for an average of $34,600 per business.

Lee Vining got $431,000 spread amongst nine businesses for an average of $47,900. Coleville’s six businesses got $81,700 for an average of $13,600 a loan. And Benton’s lone recipient of PPP largesse received $41,500.

According to data from the SBA (Small Business Administration), 2,165 jobs were retained as a result of these loans.

“But the amount of money far exceeded what we thought people were getting,” said MCED Assistant Jeff Simpson, “this was basically a lifeline to our businesses as they were closed.”

Simpson mentioned that this was not the extent of stimulus granted to Mono County. The list is simply all businesses who received grants under $150,000. It also ignores the weekly $600 unemployment checks and the personal $1,200 stimulus checks.

“The overall health is still to be determined. We are unsure of the overall effect of the shutdowns and the impact of new regulations. For example restaurants might be struggling at half-capacity and that would be hard to assess at this point.”

Addendum

On Thursday, Simpson tabulated the businesses that received more than $150,000 to get a better overall estimate of the total amount of stimulus.

The numbers are ranges and not exact. There are three ranges of money given out in Mono county, $150,000-$350,000, $350,000-$1 million, and $5-$10 million.

The lone recipient of $5-10 million was Southern Mono Healthcare and The Sheet already knows this number is $6.2 million.

Lee Vining had three businesses which received loans between $150,000-$350,000. June Lake had one business that received between $350,000-$1 million and one received $150,000-$350,000. Mammoth Lakes had 24 businesses receive between $150,000-$350,000, four businesses receive between $350,000-$1 million. With the $13 million from the loans under $150,000, Mono County was handed stimulus checks worth a range of $25.15-$34 million.

All this data, including the names of recipients above $150,000, is publicly available on the SBA website.
With a moratorium on industrial hemp set to expire this coming November, Mono County Staff laid out the framework for legalizing and regulating hemp cultivation before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday. The expectation was to put together a plan that would allow for implementation of new regulation and laws concerning hemp prior to the moratorium’s expiration date. The answer that the Community Development Department received from the Board: Forget regulation. Ban the stuff.

Hemp has been legal to grow in California under both federal and state law since 2018 and 33 counties in the state have registered and approved plans for industrial hemp operations. Those operations cover a grand total of 39,072 acres across California, the largest cultivation being in Riverside, Kern, and Fresno counties.

Hemp is a member of the cannabis family, specifically a sativa strain, with THC levels lower than 0.3%. Industrial strains have been bred to have these lower THC levels and with the specific purpose of harvesting the fibers. Fibers can be put to a variety of uses, including fabric, rope, shoes, biofuel, food, and CBD.

April Sall, a planner with the Community Development Department, told the board that industrial hemp plants are virtually indistinguishable from its more THC-potent cousins unless tested in a lab, and that biological similarity raises concerns about potential cross-pollination between the two crops. If cannabis were to pollinate hemp plants, it would raise the THC levels to create something known as “hot hemp” that would have been destroyed or abated under the Controlled Substances Act.

Conversely, if a hemp crop were to cross pollinate cannabis plants, the THC levels of those plants would be lower, potentially decreasing its desirability among consumers.

Sall also highlighted security and crop odor as additional concerns related to the hemp-cannabis similarity; someone could realistically think they’ve stumbled upon a field of cannabis and attempt to steal some without realizing what exactly they’re attempting to take.

California requires an annual registration for all industrial hemp operations, carrying with it a $900 price tag, which includes project specifications, strains being grown, testing and sampling plans, and an abatement (destruction) plan if the hemp tests over 0.3% THC.

Sall laid out four options for the county: Ban cultivation, which would not require any additional policy work. Allow cultivation under state regulations.

Institute a pilot program with a limited number of projects and a sunset period. Local regulation, which would allow for stricter guidelines than those in place at the state level.

Sall also highlighted how other counties have handled the issue. Napa and Sacramento Counties opted for an outright ban while Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Sonoma permit cultivation under state regulations. Monterey and Sanluis Obispo counties have instituted pilot programs and Inyo, Merced, and Colusa counties permit cultivation with additional local regulations.

Community Development gauged interest on the matter at the local RPAC meetings and the County planning commission.

Sall reported that the highest concerns about hemp came from the Antelope Valley RPAC, “not a surprise given conversations with commercial cannabis [there] to date,” a reference to strong community opposition to an industrial cannabis business in Walker earlier this year. Sall also noted that the Antelope Valley has one of the largest agricultural-use land blocks that could potentially play host to hemp cultivation.

A plurality of RPAC voters expressed interest in additional setback regulations (i.e. 600 ft. from sensitive receptors like schools, 300 ft. from habitable spaces) as well as odor regulations that are consistent with those applied to cannabis.

During board questions, Supervisor Fred Stump asked about LADWP’s stance on industrial operations on their land and worried that, given that Inyo and Mono counties are regulated by the same agricultural commissioner, problems could arise from differentiating policies.

“Inyo County has been, in my opinion, too loose with their stuff,” Stump said, “but we created too great a disparity for the agricultural commissioner between Inyo and Mono County, what is the capacity of that office to deal with that?”

Nathan Reade, the Inyo-Mono Agricultural Commissioner, who joined the Zoom call to respond to board questions, explained that LADWP doesn’t have a stance on hemp. In response to the issues of regulation across county lines, Reade explained, “Our biggest concern is a situation where we have to deal with abatement... our capacity to deal with something like that is very minimal.”

“Even a $25,000 abatement would absolutely tank our budget,” he added.

In response to questions from Supervisor Bob Gardner about the economic benefits and what the county would be missing out on without industrial hemp, Reade said “It’s always concern about lack of diversity in our agriculture. As agriculture commissioner, I always hate to minimize opportunities to diversify.”

He later added, at the questioning of Supervisor John Peters, that the price for industrial hemp is much lower than that of cannabis, noting “if you tax it, it’s not going to be possible to grow it and be profitable.”

The general sentiment of the board during deliberation: industrial hemp isn’t really a priority for the county right now. The board argued that with no proponent or pressure from the industry, coupled with concerns about flexibility for local jurisdictions, there wasn’t any need to go through the process of creating new policy. The board will take up the issue of industrial hemp at some point in 2021.
REAL ESTATE
continued from page 1

their jobs remotely. They don’t need anything else. But if the answer is no to any of the key questions [transportation, connectivity, et. al.], “They can’t be here for more than a weekend.”

According to Re/Max Owner/Broker Paul Oster, 23 properties went under contract locally in the period from June 21-July 5.

To put that in perspective in terms of real estate activity, Matthew Lehman’s July 1 market report indicates there were just 137 sales in the Mammoth market (100 condos, 37 single-family homes) during the first half of 2020.

Lehman notes there were 387 total condo sales in 2019.

In Bishop, Jake Rasmuson, Broker/Realtor at Bishop Real Estate, said the most limiting factor in the Bishop market is simply supply.

Normally, said Rasmuson, there are about eighty homes on the market. Last year at this time, there were 55. Right now? 40.

And the properties that do hit the market don’t stay there long.

Average days on market: 19.
Average days on market one year ago: 32.

The Southern California buyers, said Rasmuson, have shown keen interest in the vacation-type properties one finds in Aspendell or Swall Meadows. Like Bardfield and Cook, Rasmuson says low interest rates have been a real market driver. “Buyer affordability has increased dramatically.”

Rental and Commercial markets

Bishop Real Estate manages both commercial and residential real estate.

On the residential side, Rasmuson said rents have been consistent and people are making a solid effort to pay their bills.

The Sheet also spoke to two landlords in Mammoth. They said CARES Act funding has been crucial to tenants, and are hopeful the program is extended (it’s scheduled to expire at the end of this month, though congressional leaders have indicated further stimulus is planned).

On the commercial side, it’s murkier. As Rasmuson says, “You can’t get blood from a turnip.” He says smart owners are being realistic about what they can expect to collect. One encouraging note: Rasmuson says, “We’ve seen some sales [in commercial property] in a price range we’d anticipate.”

In Bishop, Jake Rasmuson’s stats show median home prices down 8% year-over-year and total properties sold down 14% for the year (as of June 30).

The above charts, reflecting the Mammoth market, are courtesy of Matthew Lehman Real Estate. As to prices, Lehman says the median sales price for homes is down 5.5% year-over-year. Condo prices are essentially unchanged.

In Bishop, Jake Rasmuson’s stats show median home prices down 8% year-over-year and total properties sold down 14% for the year (as of June 30).
LUNCH continued from page 2

Never mind that Wendilyn Grasseschi deserves some real credit for keeping the fire burning over there. That we have two newspapers serving Mammoth Lakes is a small miracle.

The irony is that The Sheet needs to join that club. The Fifty Cent club. Or as I’ve calculated, the 77-Cent club.

My business model doesn’t work right now. The Sheet cannot exist as solely advertiser-supported. I’m going to have to ask my readers to contribute. That is, if they want to resemble its current form. If they want reported stories versus press releases.

Of course, that sets one up for a real moment of truth. Like when you throw a party and send out the invites and ... you wonder if anyone will come.

If readers like the paper (but not enough to support it financially), one has to accept the verdict and move on. Even if one’s skill set is limited. I mean, one of the reasons I started the paper in the first place is that I’d rather not work for others. At least directly.

They like to get you in a compromising position
They like to get you there and smile in your face
They think, they’re so cute when they get you in that condition
Well I think it’s a total disgrace

John Mellencamp

I’ve only had one boss in my entire life who just let me be me. Her name was Peggy Parks, and she published The Challis Messenger in Challis, Idaho, seat of Custer County. County population: 4,000.

I didn’t realize what Peggy had done for me until I had the pleasure of employing Colin Wolf.

So this is what’s happening. The physical paper remains what it is. Circulation 6,000 in Mono and Inyo counties. Still free to pick up.

We’re - who am I kidding, the wonderful Julie Faber - is setting up a pay wall for online access at thesheetnews.com. It’ll cost $20 for every six months.

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Frievalt also pointed to what he saw as real opportunity for the business community to lead the charge in educating the public about Covid-19. He reported that lag times in testing are beginning to “creep up” as the county sees a shortage in rapid testing capacity.

In terms of local behavior, Frievalt reported “we’re certainly seeing an elevated concern from citizens who’ve worked hard locally to have us avoid a lot of this, and we’re just trying to balance scarce resources with the ability to keep this thing contained.

Public Health Program Manager Bryan Wheeler took over from Frievalt to talk about the recent cases in the county. Wheeler reported that in addition to the new confirmed cases, the county is also monitoring “several individuals of interest” who are considered to be presumptive positive for Covid-19. From those positive tests, the county has traced 30 contacts.

“Members of the service industry and the Hispanic community continue to be at a higher risk,” Wheeler told the board, noting that those two groups account for most of the cases in Mono County. He also explained that several restaurant and hotels have been implicated as potential hotspots for infection, although none were explicitly named.

Wheeler estimated that those in the current case spike would have been infected in early June, as symptoms began a week or so before drawing any conclusions.

He gave a brief risk assessment of activities in the service industry, starting with takeout/delivery (low risk, low contact) at the bottom, outdoor service in the middle due to decreased close contact, and indoor in-person service as the most risky.

“Everyone has their mask off to eat and they’re talking,” Wheeler summarized.

Tom Boo, County Health Officer, added that “we certainly expected an increase in cases with an increase in economic activity and movement.”

“Although this increment seems rather sharp and somewhat alarming to me,” Boo said, “I think we need to complete the investigations of the existing cases and see what happens over the next week or so before drawing any conclusions.”

“I share Bryan’s concerns about some of the service industry establishments that have been impacted … but overall our metrics still look okay.” Boo referenced the low percentage of positive test results (around 3%) and Mammoth Hospital’s continued efficiency as markers that the county isn’t underwater yet.

The Board’s Covid update was instigated in part by letters sent in by constituents asking that they consider enacting new measures to keep Mono County residents safe.

Colleen Moxley, a Mono County resident and nurse at Northern Inyo Hospital, expressed concern about public backlash to Covid mitigation efforts, writing, “What has happened to the Health Officer in Orange County [who resigned after being subject to intense harassment] was appalling. And locally to see Dr. Thomas Boo who is doing a great job and working hard to keep us all safe - to have local residents create a petition against him is atrocious.”

Moxley asked that business owners be held accountable, citing instances where she had visited businesses where directives were not being followed.

“Our community needs you to put public safety first,” Moxley wrote. “Employees and customers of said businesses are at risk. We need to open our businesses but thoughtfully. I believe the directives in place make sense however, if they are not enforced, they are not protective.”

Another letter, this one from Ann Gimpel and Diane Eagle Kataoka explicitly asked the Supervisors to reverse the opening process in Mammoth Lakes and unincorporated Mono County. Gimpel and Kataoka write: “So many people come up here from the LA area, and these people are flooding into Mono County. That wouldn’t be so bad if they followed the rules and wore masks. But they do not wear masks. In truth, no one enforces either physical/social distancing or mask wearing. Many will place a mask that only covers their mouth, which is almost worthless. Tourists become belligerent when requested to put on their masks or lift them up from their chin.”

The letter references a purported incident at the Vons in Mammoth Lakes where a local asked a tourist to where a mask up only to have the tourist threaten to pull out a gun.

The authors include text from a proposed amendment being considered by the town council of Taos, New Mexico that would mandate face coverings and social distancing, with violations of the orders considered a petty misdemeanor.

“Without teeth, no edict, law, or proclamation is worth the paper it’s written on,” Gimpel and Kataoka wrote.

COVID-19 Numbers

As of July 9, Mono County has had 49 total cases with eight new cases, four of which came on July 5. A Mono County press release stated, “All confirmed cases are residents of the Mammoth Lakes and surrounding area region.”

The same press release mentioned the rising cases in California which has led to Governor Gavin Newsom to increase restrictions in certain counties. On July 9, Newsom announced that California had its single highest death toll related to coronavirus with 149 new deaths. Newsom did ask that people focus on the 7 day mortality rate, which is 73 lives lost each day.

Inyo County had two new cases in the last week bringing the total to 35 cases. 26 of these cases have recovered and there has been one death. There are eight cases pending.

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**Help Wanted**

Sierra Employment Services, Inc. is hiring for the following positions:

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**Mammoth Spa Creations** is looking for an additional member for its team. We currently have an immediate opening for a spa Maintenance Technician position. We are also hiring an Office Assistant. These positions offer vacation allocation, benefits and paid holidays. Experience is preferred, but not required. For details and to apply, call 760-934-1901 or stop by the store located at 1401 Tavern Road in Mammoth Lakes for more information and to pick up an application. Resumes can be e-mailed to mammothspa@aol.com.

**For Rent**


**HOSPITAL** continued from page 1

According to the American Hospital Association there has been a, "total four-month financial impact of $202.6 billion in losses for America’s hospitals and health systems, or an average of $50.7 million per month" due to COVID-19.

This estimation spans from March 1 to June 30.

"Mammoth Hospital has lost a total of $15.7 million," said Van Winkle. "We were fortunate to receive $6.2 million from the CARES funding to help offset the continued costs of staff and physicians to be ready for any type of patient care needs. So for these first 3 months our net loss is approximately 4.5 million."

"Collections are running at about half of what they normally are," said Van Winkle.

Is this cause for concern?

"Yeah, we are concerned," said Parker before Van Winkle mentioned, "the loss of revenue is concerning because it jeopardizes our ability to provide care."

Hospitals are currently at the mercy of federal and state orders regarding contraction and expansion.

The good news: "We have gone into the pandemic with a healthy cash position thanks in large part to Melanie," said Van Winkle.

"I have been here for 10.5 years. We have been extremely diligent at managing the budget within our means. We have built up a pretty good cash reserve that time. Thank God we had such good results because many hospitals have not had the cash to get through this," said Van Winkle.

When asked what specifically went into budget management, Van Winkle said that her and her team evaluate staffing based on patient volume and act accordingly. Additionally, the cost of supplies changes rapidly. Van Winkle will negotiate these contracts regularly. This is not an exhaustive list and Parker mentioned the fiscal budget decisions are often a result of "a data point analysis and our benchmarking efforts."

It was hard to pin down the exact amount of cash in reserves but Van Winkle said it was around $60 million. The hospital district has about $30 million cash for regular operations and $50 million in reserves for capital projects.

Mammoth Hospital, per state regulations, needs to upgrade one of its facilities in accordance with California Earthquake building regulations. Van Winkle said the project could cost "over $10 million."

Which explains the capital project funding thanks in large part to Melanie, "I have, we were fortunate to receive $50.7 billion per month due to COVID-19."

Without a staff, there is no hospital.

"These are challenging times for everyone. We at Mammoth Hospital are doing our best to manage our finances prudently so we can be here for years to come for the healthcare needs of our community and visitors," said Van Winkle.

With COVID cases going up, the Sheet asked Parker if his hospital could weather another shutdown.

"It depends on what is required during that shutdown," said Parker. "The first shut down halted all ‘elective surgeries.’ Parker told The Sheet that Mammoth Hospital’s COVID positive and negative zones would ideally allow a different set of operations in the event of a second shut down.

Parker is optimistic this won’t happen again. He thanked the community for its support, hand-washing, and covering up. "We were not overwhelmed because of our community. I just want to show my appreciation for those who took this seriously allowing us to build up our supplies."

**PERSONALS**

In search of ... someone who’s interested in a little role play. You play the nose and I’ll play the swab. That or wear your mask.

I saw you ... are very Covid-nervous and don’t want to co-habit enclosed spaces. So I did the obvious - that you’d be found in the same neighborhood would mind if we had sex on the balcony? I heard you ... really practiced your technique when you went to the toilet because of COVID? We don’t quite know the net negative effect yet," said Van Winkle.

Hospital finances are confusing in general. The payments for services come from several sources: government payers such as Medicare and Medi-Cal, commercial insurance providers and small amounts owed from patients for their co-insurance or deductible amounts. International patients require international payments. Services are always performed in good faith and occasionally payments never come through. All of this makes it impossible to look at a hospital like a normal business.

For the purpose of comparison (to the cash reserves), here are some relevant numbers.

Mammoth Hospital has monthly expenditures of a little over $6 million. This adds up to roughly $72-77 million a year.

These are essentially fixed costs. Most of this covers salaries and benefits.

Without a staff, there is no hospital. COVID has heavily impacted the revenue side.

In April, the Hospital lost almost $6 million of revenue. In May, the Hospital was short about $2.6 million of revenue.

The losses from these three months and any future losses will be paid from cash reserves. Any dip into the cash reserves simply makes it more likely that the hospital will have to take on debt in the future.

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**Calendar of Events**

**TOWN STUFF**

**July 11-12, Chipper Weekend in June Lake.** Location: June Mtn. parking lot.

**July 11/**

Plein Air Series: Pastels with Randall Smith. Learn to capture the landscape as you observe in pastel with the expert guidance Randall Smith. Meet at Horseshoe Lake @ 8 a.m. Limited to 12 people, break for lunch at noon.

**July 13/**

Town Council Special Meeting @ 4 p.m. Visit the Town website at www.townofmammothlakes.ca.gov to attend via granicus.

**July 14/**

Mono County Board of Supervisors @ 9 a.m. in Bridgeport. For agenda/packet/to attend online, visit http://www.monoounty.ca.gov/meetings.

Inyo County Board of Supervisors meets at 3:30 a.m. over teleconference. For Zoom link: visit https://zoom.us/j/868254781. Agendas available at inyocounty.us

**July 15/**

Town Council Special Meeting @ 2 p.m. Visit the Town website @ www.townofmammothlakes.ca.gov to attend via granicus.

Town Council regular meeting follows @ 4 p.m.

4th Annual Crowley Trail Run is going virtual this year. Participants have from July 15 - August 1 to complete the run. For more information and how to sign up, visit https://crowleylaketrailrun.com.

**July 16/**

Mammoth Voices gives a how-to primer on running for office. Zoom meeting. RSVP to learn more. mammothvoices@gmail.com.

**July 18/**

Kendra Atleework socially distanced book signing of her literary debut "Miracle Country" at Bishop City Park, 6-8 p.m. Hosted by Spellbinder Books.

**Ongoing:**

Wave Rave Summer Skate Camps. Register at: https://apm.activecommunities.com/mammothrecreation/Activity_Search

The Cast Off is open on Tuesday and Saturdays only due to Covid-19 restrictions. No book drop off when closed. We’re overwhelmed with donations at this time.

**Mammoth Liquor**

Beer lovers’ candy store
Selection of more than 300 beers
DOOR’S OPEN, BEER’S COLD, STOP ON BY!

**Barber Shop**

Barber Ellen McDonald
Every Tuesday by appt. only
Regular Haircuts I Military Cuts I Fades
Local/Active Military Discounts

**Mono County Library locations**

will offer pre-arranged pick ups for library materials. You only need a library card and an internet connection. Visit monocolibrarities.org for a link to a video tutorial using the online catalog.

**Devil’s Creek Distillery in Mammoth Lakes** is offering tastings by appointment only. Call 760-279-9942 to schedule your tasting.

**Summer Reading Program with Mono County Libraries** - June 22 - Aug 1. Register by emailing participants name, age, and local library to cdevine@monocoe.org.

**AT THE MOVIES**

**Movies Playing This Week 07/10 to 07/16**

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**Stop Asking So Many Questions!**

By Albert Camus

_Vintage Books_ 122 pp. (1942)

_T_0 say that these strange times is an understatement. The early part of quarantines marked by deserted streets and Tiger King on Netflix feels as though it happened a year ago. The wildfires in Australia and tensions with Iran? At least a decade. The list of important events and dates that will mark 2020 in future history books is already extensive and the year isn't half over.

In the midst of this chaos, and with a lot more free time than was previously available, it is almost inevitable to begin asking the larger questions of why.

Enter Albert Camus.

Camus', _The Stranger_, first published in 1942, counters the relentless pace of life with utter indifference on the part of its protagonist, a French Algerian named Meursault.

Camus was famous for his absurdist philosophy, which highlights the contradiction of man's search for meaning in a meaningless, uncaring universe, and the inability to transcend that in the monotone voice of its narrator. Meursault floats through life, taking in and responding to the world around him in a matter-of-fact manner. The novel opens with the death of Meursault's mother, written plainly as, “Maman died today. Or yesterday. I don’t know, I just got a telegram from the home: ‘Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.’ That doesn’t mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday.”

Meursault’s indifference to the news, and subsequent focus on the time of death, seemed to the author to be too difficult to comprehend; he treats his mother’s death as a fact, something that has occurred, and never seems to all alluded to or indirectly mentioned around Meursault and he simply does not care at all about that much.

Camus never explicitly states the reasoning for Meursault’s apathetic nature, though he does hint that his responses aren’t considered normal. Meursault’s friends and acquaintances live emotional lives around him; he comments on and attempts to help them, but without any overarching sense of morality or ethics.

And in true French fashion, he drinks, smokes and broods in silence.

Take his relationship with Marie Cordona, a co-worker. They spend time together after the day her mother’s funeral and an increasing amount of together. This was where “I had to want to marry her, he responds, “I said it didn’t make any difference to me and that if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know who I was. I don’t know who same way I had last time, that it didn’t mean anything but I probably didn’t love her.”

His rhetoric of “it doesn’t matter” would be hard if weren’t so frustrating. Meursault’s passivity pervades in the narrative style; nothing truly happens in the active voice throughout the novel.

The novel’s most peculiar moment is also the first in which Meursault actively reacts to his world and makes a conscious decision: shooting another man five times on the beach. Even then, Camus offers no insight into Meursault’s thoughts, only offering that the heat and brightness of the sun were near novel.

It’s a meaningless murder. There was no real threat to Meursault’s life. Indeed, the victim is nameless and his identity only matters as that of a witness. When Meursault is put on trial, the effective put intensely under scrutiny; his quietude and passivity are taken as an utter lack of remorse.

And Meursault doesn’t truly feel anything about the killing. His time in jail simply passes and he really doesn’t mind being imprisoned. He reasons with his execution by saying, “Since we’re all going to die, it’s obvious that when and how don’t matter. Therefore (and the difficult thing was to not lose sight of all the reasoning that went into this decision) I had to accept the rejection of my appeal.”

The ultimate point? It is as simple as “does any of this really matter?” Camus wrote to ask our society, and even those who does not weep at his mother’s funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death. I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play any male role in society.

Camus simply asks why this is, if the outcome will always be the same. But he doesn’t ask that you practice extreme empathy, he asks that you stop asking so many questions and embrace what life brings to you.
By Ben Trefry

If there’s one thing local residents heard and saw on the 4th of July, it was fireworks. In Bishop, folks were setting off private stashes until 1 a.m. It was relentless.

Many dogs have subsequently visited pet psychologists this week.

In Mammoth, there was a low-key parade. Noodle-ly won for best business float. Of course, owner Taylor Kumlue is a professional artist. She better have won! (See photo page five).

But Ben Trefry was in Bridgeport on the 4th for The Sheet. This is his report.

It goes without saying that it was different due to COVID, but the Bridgeport 4th of July festivities still happened this year with vendors, fireworks, and an (unofficial) parade/protest.

In the week leading up to the 4th, as Coronavirus cases spiked across the state, the committee in charge of planning Bridgeport’s festivities consulted with the Mono County Health Department and decided to replace the in-person parade with a virtual parade, which would consist of posting 4th of July photos under the hashtag #bridgeport4thofjuly2020. Within a few hours, however, other Bridgeport residents on Facebook pushed back by organizing their own parade, a “protest for freedom.”

Just like Bishop’s Black Lives Matter protest in June, the original organizers could cancel something, but they couldn’t stop people from showing up.

This was smaller than past parades, and many of the usual floats were absent, but there were several decorated trucks, classic cars, and motorcycles. The theme of the original (canceled) parade was supposed to be “Flags and Freedom: Honoring our vets and that carried over to the protest/parade. There were floats thanking veterans, police officers, and healthcare workers.

The California Highway Patrol did some traffic control on both sides of town for safety, but since the parade wasn’t official, traffic wasn’t entirely stopped.

At one point a tractor-trailer passed through town, the driver honking loudly in support of the parade.

“Sheck no, it wasn’t nearly as good as usual … but I’m extra glad we came to support them,” said Jane Dale, from Lake Elsinore. Dale has been coming to the Bridgeport 4th of July for roughly 20 years. In conversations with other attendees, this was a common theme: for many people, going to the Bridgeport 4th is a long and very important tradition.

For example, Shirley May has been going since she was a teenager in the early 1960s. When the Sheet talked to her, May was with her husband, David May, and Tracey Campbell, a friend from Clovis (the Mays live winters in Clovis, and summers in Bridgeport).

“It’s really good to see people out and about,” said Campbell. “I’d like to see more people … this little town would shut down if we didn’t have this, and how sad would that be?”

Naturally, there were some vendors missing this year. Most conspicuously, the Lee Vining High School PTOs fireworks booth was absent. The Sheet also talked to Rich and Merci Courtright, who sold tacos at the parade during the last few years but decided against it this year, figuring that the crowds would be too small to make it worthwhile.

Mary Lent of the Eastern Sierra Trading Co., who was selling merchandise with her granddaughter Joye Lehen, lamented the reduction in vendors and visitors, but said that business was good despite that. (When the Sheet talked to her, Lent’s booth was being visited by a steady stream of prospective customers.) “I was so happy we had [a parade] because Bridgeport without it would really be a non-existent Fourth,” she told the Sheet. In contrast to the vendors who dropped out, Lent was selling at this year’s Bridgeport 4th of July for the first time since the 1980s.

As for COVID: There weren’t nearly as many people as usual, which was good for social distancing. Unfortunately, few wore masks (even though they were supposed to be mandatory). The Sheet estimated that, at any given time, 70% were not wearing masks (even though they were supposed to be mandatory). The Sheet estimated that, at any given time, 70% were not wearing masks, while 30% were. On the sidewalks there were enough people that it was at times difficult, but not impossible, to maintain safe distancing.

July 4th gatherings throughout Mono County and in other places almost certainly have resulted in significant numbers of new infections,” said Mono County Health Officer Tom Boo in an email to the Sheet. “I think chances are modest that we will see a substantial local outbreak that we can directly attribute to attending some part of the July 4 activities.”

Most people the Sheet talked to didn’t seem too concerned. “I wish people would be a little bit smarter about [wearing masks], but it is what it is,” said Rich Courtright of Rancho Cucamonga. Another attendee, who asked to be identified as Les, was more blunt: “I agree that there is a Coronavirus, but they’re pushing it too much politically. They want to ruin this country, which we can’t let happen.”

Something that came up frequently was the sense of normalcy that Bridgeport’s festivities provide: that even in the wild ride that has been 2020, people can gather to honor our veterans and country, see kids darting across the courthouse lawn in an energetic game of tag, and enjoy classic festival staples like kettle corn and snow cones.

As Les put it, “It’s a patriot’s parade.” There is a risk to everything, and life involves weighing those risks against the rewards. And for the people who’ve been coming to Bridgeport’s 4th of July for decades, it is far more important and meaningful than the average public gathering. But … to minimize that inherent risk, it would’ve been nice to see more people wearing masks.

Mary Lent and Joye Lehen

Mammoth Community Water District will commence a State required Cross Connection Control survey to look for hazards to the District’s potable water supply. This mandatory survey will be conducted by inspectors from Backflow Solutions, Inc. and will require these inspectors to access properties, residential and commercial, serviced by the District. For more information contact the District.
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