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Hospitality groups trying to get outdoor dining rules relaxed

By MARY SCHLEY

LEADERS in the hospitality industry are working to convince county and state officials to relax the ban on outdoor dining, arguing that most of the spread of coronavirus happens in people's homes and at large gatherings, not while sitting outside in a parklet enjoying a cheeseburger and fries.

"When you had tables in parklets, you had distancing and sanitizing, and everything was monitored," Janine Chicourrat, the new chair of the Monterey County Hospitality Association and wife of Mayor Dave Potter, told The Pine Cone this week. "Now you have people eating their takeout on curbs, off their cars, off garbage cans" — basically any outdoor surface they can find.

"It's ridiculous," she said.

At last week's Monterey County Board of Supervisors meeting, Chicourrat asked the supervisors to at least support "outdoor picnicking," allowing restaurant owners to set up tables and chairs in their parklets for customers to use while eating their takeout, without any table service.

She pointed to a recent study in New York that examined contact tracing and found that nearly three-quarters of coronavirus cases were transmitted in households and

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Confusion over vaccinations deepens

■ Governor says one thing, county health department says another

By KELLY NIX

A MONTH after the effort began to inoculate everyone in Monterey County against the coronavirus, which has infected more than 30,000 here, with 248 deaths, few-



A lone car utilizes a drive-through vaccination clinic in operation at Cal State Monterey Bay. A Pine Cone photographer was denied access to the clinic, but CSUMB released this picture, which doesn't exactly show an ambitious vaccination effort underway.

er than half the 24,150 vaccine doses received since that time have been administered, county health officer Dr. Ed Moreno said this week.

In an effort to speed up the vaccination rate, the county health department said Thursday that a much bigger group of healthcare workers and others likely to be exposed to the virus at work is eligible to get vaccinated, and a clinic in a CSUMB parking lot was in operation to provide the shots.

Meanwhile, Gov. Gavin Newsom, also trying to boost California's lagging rate of vaccinations — just 31 percent of the doses in the state have been administered — surprised everybody by suddenly announcing Wednesday that people 65 and older were eligible to be inoculated. But Newsom provided no details about when and where they could get jabbed, and several hours later, Monterey County issued a statement saying the 65-plus group was not yet eligible here.

'1,000 people per day'

Adding to the rampant confusion was the uncertainty about how many shots have been given in Monterey County.

In a briefing with reporters Wednesday, Moreno said he had no way of knowing for certain how many shots have been administered, but it was "probably at least 11,000" — an estimate based on data from a state vaccination website, according to Moreno.

Besides using state data, which Moreno said seemed to be underestimating the true number of vaccinations carried out in the county, the other method of determining how many shots have been administered is figuring how many doses remain of the total received — something he said Wednesday his office has not done yet.

"Right now, we are looking to trying to get information from the hospitals and the clinics," he said, without indicating when his office might do that.

But at the current rate of vaccine administration — fewer than 3,000 shots a week — it would take almost three years to immunize everyone in Monterey County, which has a population of roughly 450,000. Moreno didn't acknowledge the slow-going vaccine results in the county, and instead credited the effort.

"We are making, I believe, reasonable progress through the first tier," he told the supervisors on Tuesday.

According to a Bloomberg vaccine tracker, California has administered 2.26 doses per 100 people.

Moreno told the supervisors that in addition to requiring more vaccine and staff to immunize people in the second group — Phase 1b — Monterey County would

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Visiting nurse faces coronavirus' harsh reality

By CHRIS COUNTS

A YOUNG woman from New Hampshire may be staying at a house on Torres Street, but don't get the idea she's on vacation. Instead, on most days, Meghan Fitzpatrick is busy battling the coronavirus on the front line at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital.

And sometimes, the front line is where very difficult news has to be delivered.

"Last week, I was looking after a sweet old man," Fitzpatrick told The Pine Cone. "He was so kind and appreciative and alert. I had to be the one who had to tell him he's probably not going to make it."

The man passed a short time later, becoming another sad statistic to society and leaving Fitzpatrick rattled.

"I can't believe I was conversing with this person," said Fitzpatrick, who came here in August after learning about

a critical need for nurses in Salinas. "He was holding my hand, and he died. I go home, deal with my emotions, and come back and do it again. Last night, another patient did the same thing."

The nurse said the last few weeks have been particularly "intense and disheartening."

"Because Covid has been around for a year, I feel like a lot of people have settled into people dying, but we're still facing it every day," she said. "I have found myself hiding in the patient's bathroom and holding back the tears because I'm so sad for them and their family, and their family can't be there for them."

'I love my job'

For Fitzpatrick and her fellow nurses, the hours battling the pandemic can be exhausting, not only physically, but emotionally. She said some of her colleagues do online therapy and use meditation apps to help counter the stress,

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COMMISSION CHASTISES OPPONENTS OF ADA RAMPS

■ PacRep gets OK for theater upgrades

By MARY SCHLEY

A GROUP of residents who object to the installation of handicap-access ramps and air conditioners at the Golden Bough theater were shut down by the planning commission this week, as some commissioners took umbrage at their ongoing opposition to a theater that's been in the neighborhood longer than they have been alive.

The commission voted unanimously Wednesday night to OK Pacific Repertory Theatre's application to make the ADA and HVAC improvements, despite an appeal from the neighbors and their attorney, Alex Lorca.

PacRep, which owns the Golden Bough, submitted plans last May for exit ramps on the north and south sides, walkway and planter improvements, and the addition of more air conditioners — work which, under the city code, is considered so minor it would normally be approved after a simple review by the planning and building department, but the neighbors' objections triggered a full planning commission hearing.

Years of friction

The Golden Bough is surrounded by homes, and some of the people who live in them have complained for years about noise, parking and other issues related to the pro-

ductions at the theater, which PacRep has occupied for the last quarter-century. Lorca and his clients, Patrick and Paige Healy, and their neighbors argued that constructing ramps and a set of stairs, and adding air-conditioning

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AT&T Pro-Am to be played with no celebs

By MARY SCHLEY

FIRST, THE coronavirus pandemic drove organizers of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am to ban spectators. Now, the celebrities and amateurs set to compete alongside the pros will have to stay home, too.

"Due to local Covid-19 circumstances in the Monterey Peninsula," tournament officials announced Thursday, the Feb. 8-14 tournament will only feature 156 professional players and will only be held at the Pebble Beach Golf Links and Spyglass Hill.

Played in Del Monte Forest for three-quarters of a century, the tournament typically features PGA Tour pros,

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Nurse Meghan Fitzpatrick works with Covid-19 patients at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital. She shared details about the sad reality she faces each day.