



AP



Idaho Statesman

Food banks see demand rise during coronavirus crisis



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Samuel Burns, who oversees the Vineyard food pantry in Garden City, said it has experienced a spike in the number of people seeking help to put food on their tables during the coronavirus pandemic. "Year to date ... about 70% of every single household that registered to get food were new applicants," he said. With assistance from the Idaho Foodbank and volunteers, the Christian organization is meeting the challenge.

Idaho Foodbank distributions up 30% amid record unemployment

BY JOHN SOWELL
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The food pantry at the Vineyard Boise Christian Fellowship wasn't set to open for a half-hour, but a line of cars had already parked next to the warehouse north of Chinden Boulevard.

Since the coronavirus pandemic struck Idaho in March, the pantry, which operates from 10 to noon on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, has seen the number of people needing food for their families rise.

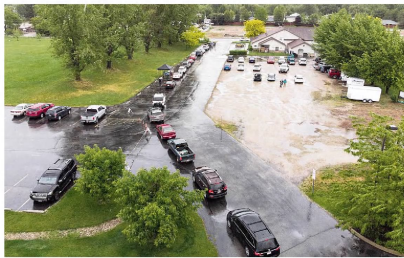
Pantry volunteers used to packing boxes for 150 families a week before the pandemic are sometimes seeing more than that on a single day at the warehouse, located behind the church at 4950 N. Bradley St. in Garden City.

"The numbers just skyrocketed," Samuel Burns, the church's benevolence director, said in an interview Wednesday. "We did 300 families one day, 200 families another day."

Food comes from The Idaho Foodbank, El-Ada Community Partnership, Feeding America, a national food bank, and several grocery stores, including Albertsons, Fred Meyer, Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.

Across Idaho, the amount of food distributed by The Idaho Foodbank has increased 30% during the pandemic. The private, donor-supported nonprofit, established in 1984, serves 280 community-based organizations statewide, including the food pantry run by Vineyard Boise Christian Fellowship.

In April, the Foodbank's warehouses in Boise, Pocatello



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A line of cars waits outside the Vineyard food pantry on Wednesday. "When the coronavirus initially broke out, we saw about a 100% increase in our numbers for about a month," Samuel Burns, benevolence director for Vineyard Boise Christian Fellowship, said.

and Lewiston distributed 2.4 million pounds of food. "Looking at the increased number of unemployed individuals, that puts a strain on people's budgets," CEO Karen Vauk said by phone. "For some

individuals, especially those who are waiting for their unemployment benefits, it's not hard to understand they find themselves needing some additional

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Former Idaho police officer sentenced for 4 sex crimes

BY RUTH BROWN
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A Payette County judge has sentenced a former Fruitland police officer who sexually abused multiple juvenile boys while off-duty.

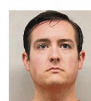
District Judge Susan Wiebe

sentenced Alexander Plaza, 25, to 10 years in prison with five years fixed, but she retained jurisdiction and granted him a rider program. In the rider program, Plaza will be incarcerated for up to a year while undergoing programming, and if he is successful, he could be released from prison and serve the rest

of his sentence on probation. Should he be granted probation and violate it, he could be sent back to prison for the remainder of the sentence.

In January, Plaza pleaded guilty to three counts of sexual battery by solicitation of a child ages 16 or 17 and one count of sexual abuse of a child younger than age 16. Wiebe sentenced Plaza to 5-10 years in prison on each count, with the sentences to run concurrently.

None of the abuse occurred



Alexander Plaza

while Plaza was on duty. The Fruitland Police Department confirmed last year that at the time of Plaza's resignation in June, he was serving in a reserve officer capacity.

Plaza was arrested in

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The groups also said the law is a violation of Title IX, the 1972 law that bars sex discrimination in education. The groups are asking the court to permanently prevent Idaho from enforcing the law.

Backers said the law, called the Fairness in Women's Sports Act, is needed because transgender female athletes have physical advantages.

They also cite Title IX, contending that allowing transgender athletes on girls'

SEE TRANSGENDER, 3A

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Buying canned cocktails in June benefits Idaho COVID-19 relief

BY JACOB SCHOLL AND MICHAEL DEEDS
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Want to support an Idaho business and help fight the coronavirus? Buy Boozie brand canned cocktails during the month of June. Co-founded by two Boise State alumni and produced “farm-to-can” in Rigby, Boozie offers mixed drinks crafted with vodka or tequila. In June, \$2 of every can purchased at participating

retailers will go to the Boozie Cocktails For COVID-19 Idaho Relief Fund. The promotion, in conjunction with Hayden Beverage, will pledge up to \$60,000. “Funds will support local registered nurses who are facing the frontlines of the pandemic,” according to a news release, “in addition to student loan debt upon their graduation from Boise State University’s RN to BS program. The Blaine County Charitable Fund, which provides

grant money to Blaine County residents who are experiencing financial hardship due to the unanticipated crisis, will also receive a donation. “Participating retailers include Albertsons, Atkinsons’ Market, both Boise Co-op locations, Costco, Fred Meyer, Idaho State Liquor Stores and Whole Foods Market. “Atkinsons’ Market will also contribute a dollar for each can of Boozie sold at one of their three locations during the month of June. Atkinsons’ contribu-

tions will solely benefit the Blaine County Charitable Fund.” Online: boozie.com. **IDAHO’S CASE COUNT UNCLEAR** After a large jump in coronavirus cases Friday, state officials have not clarified inconsistent numbers reported Saturday. Health officials reported a spike in new coronavirus cases Friday, indicating that there were 98 new cases. On Saturday, conflict-

ing numbers left the state’s overall case count unclear. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare reported 31 new cases Saturday. That number does not include two new cases in Bannock County or single cases in Bonneville and Benewah. Benewah’s first case was reported Saturday by the Panhandle Health District, and the person who tested positive is a girl under the age of 18. Between the numbers reported Friday evening

by local health departments and numbers reported Saturday by the state, there is a discrepancy of 16 cases. State officials did not add the cases to its totals on Saturday. As of Saturday, there were 2,642 cases of the coronavirus, which causes the COVID-19 respiratory disease, in Idaho. Seventy-nine people have died because of the virus. State totals were expected to be updated again late Tuesday afternoon. Cases have been reported in 34 of Idaho’s 44 counties. Community spread has been detected in 18 Idaho counties. **Jacob Scholl: 208-377-6234, @Jacob_Scholl**

Idaho man gets 15-year sentence for DUI that injured 16-year-old

BY RUTH BROWN
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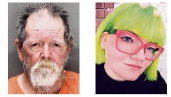
After striking a 16-year-old girl with his vehicle while driving under the influence, a Melba man might spend

the rest of his life in prison. On May 20, Ada County District Court Judge Peter Barton sentenced Joseph Jefferies, 70, to 15 years in prison after a jury convicted him in March of aggravated driving under

the influence. Jefferies could be eligible for parole after 10 years, according to online court records. Jefferies was arrested after an incident on Sept. 2, 2019, at West Avalon Street and North School

Avenue in Kuna. Authorities say he hit Sunshine Bryden in a marked crosswalk while she was walking her dog. He was driving with a blood alcohol content of .096, exceeding the legal limit of .08. The force of the impact moved the girl about 70 feet down the street, according to the Ada County Sheriff’s Office. The dog was also injured. Last year, the teenag-

er’s mother, Carolyn Bryden, told the Idaho Statesman that her daughter sustained a broken neck and leg, and had to undergo surgery. If and when Jefferies is released from prison, his driver’s license will be suspended for five years. This wasn’t his first DUI conviction. He also had convictions in 2006 and 2001, according to online court records.



Joseph Jefferies



Sunshine Bryden

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Volunteers at the Vineyard Boise Christian Fellowship food pantry fill boxes with donated fruits and vegetables, meat, milk and cheese and boxed items meant to provide needy families with more than a week’s worth of food.

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assistance, and food is oftentimes the area where they’ll trim their budget.” Ada, Blaine, Valley and Cassia counties had the greatest increases in need, Vauck said. Ada County, with nearly 500,000 people, is the state’s most populous. Blaine and Valley counties, where outdoor recreation and tourism are important to the economy, saw those industries shut down because of the coronavirus. Cassia County, in the Burley area, has a low per capita income, \$21,547 in 2018, according to the U. S. Census Bureau.

At Vineyard’s pantry, the number of people needing assistance span all income groups, Burns said.

It was amazing to me, though, to see Jaguars and BMWs and Mercedes in the food lines,” he said.

The biggest need came in the last weeks of March and the first weeks of April. “And then, my guess is because of unemployment checks coming in and the stimulus package (checks), the numbers went down,” he said.

St. Vincent de Paul also saw a big jump in people needing assistance at its food bank at 3209 W. Overland Road in Boise. And like the Vineyard pantry, the need has dropped off in recent weeks.

“It’s still running a little above normal but it’s pretty stable right now, Ralph May, St. Vincent de Paul’s executive director, said by phone.

St. Vincent, which operates its food bank at 3209 W. Overland Road on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday mornings, is working with The Idaho Foodbank to develop a mobile pantry that would go into some of Boise’s most impoverished neighborhoods.

Idaho recorded a record high unemployment rate of 11.5% in April, according to the Idaho Labor Department. It surpassed the previous record of 10.2% in December 1982 and a Great Recession peak of 9.6 percent in June 2009.

Before the pandemic, 90% of the food distributed by The Idaho Foodbank was donated. More recently, it had to buy more food to keep up with the demand, Vauck said. “Last year, for the entire year, we purchased 18 truckloads of food, while the rest was donated,” she said. “In the last 90 days, we have purchased 29 truckloads of food.”

The public could help, Vauck said, by donating to The Idaho Foodbank so more food can be purchased for those in need. Every dollar provides food for five meals, she said.

IDAHO FOOD DONATIONS HELP IN OTHER STATES

Last month, a photo in The Times Picayune newspaper in New Orleans featured a familiar sight to fruit buyers in Idaho.

A stack of boxes carried the red logo of Symms Fruit Ranch. Apples from the Caldwell grower were handed out to 2,000 people who came to a food-bank giveaway near Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

Sally Symms, a spokesperson for Symms Fruit Ranch, said she didn’t know how the boxes of apples got to Louisiana but suspects it may have come through Feeding America.

“They source products from grow-shippers like us to supply food banks throughout the country,” Symms said by phone. “So it could have been something that we had set up with them.”

Feeding America provides meals to 46 million people across the U.S. each year.

“Forty percent on average of the people that we’re seeing now have never relied upon the charitable food system before,” CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot told CBS News’ “Face the Nation” on May 17. “So we’re definitely seeing different people showing up.”

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Weather looking up for historic SpaceX liftoff

BY MARCIA DUNN
Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — With the weather improving, SpaceX and NASA officials vowed Tuesday to keep crew safety the top priority for the nation’s first astronaut launch to orbit in nearly a decade.

Veteran NASA astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken were set to make history Wednesday afternoon at 4:33 p.m. Eastern, riding SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon capsule to the International Space Station on a test flight.

SpaceX was on the cusp of becoming the first private company to put astronauts in orbit, something achieved by just

three countries — Russia, the U.S. and China.

On the eve of the launch, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said from Kennedy Space Center that both the space agency and SpaceX have been diligent about making sure everyone in the launch loop knows they’re free to halt the countdown if there’s a concern.

President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence are expected at Kennedy for the planned 4:33 p.m. liftoff, but “our highest priority” will remain the astronauts’ safety, according to Bridenstine.

Bridenstine said he texted the two astronauts Monday and told them, “If you want me to stop this thing for any reason, say so. I will stop it in a

heartbeat if you want me to.” They both came back and they said, “We’re go for launch.”

Hans Koenigsmann, a SpaceX vice president, said Monday evening that he and other company workers have imagined themselves in the astronauts’ shoes on launch day — “or their helmets.” “That changes the equation pretty dramatically,” he said.

SpaceX has been launching cargo capsules to the space station since 2012.

“It’s a huge step, obviously, going from cargo ... to launching two people that are dads as we call them and have families, kids, wives,” Koenigsmann added.

NASA will have input throughout the countdown, but in the end, it will be SpaceX giving the final go — with NASA’s concurrence.

FROM PAGE 1A TRANSGENDER

and women’s teams would negate nearly 50 years of progress women have made since that law took effect and that is credited with opening up sports to female athletes, and along with it scholarships and other opportunities.

Specifically, the lawsuit contends the law violates the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause because it is discriminatory and the 4th Amendment’s protections against invasion of privacy because of tests required should an athlete’s

gender be challenged.

Two plaintiffs are bringing the lawsuit. One is an unnamed Boise area high school student who is cisgender. Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person was identified as having at birth.

The other is Lindsay Hexco, 19, who will be a sophomore this fall at Boise State University and hopes to qualify for the women’s cross-country team. She competed on the boys’ team at a Moorpark, California, high

school before transitioning after graduating.

The NCAA has a policy allowing transgender athletes to compete. But the sponsor of the Idaho law, Republican Barbara Ehardt, has called the NCAA policy “permissive.”

In February, the families of three Connecticut female high school runners filed a federal lawsuit seeking to block transgender athletes from participating in girls sports. The families contend that allowing athletes with male anatomy to compete has deprived their daughters of track titles and scholarship opportunities.

FROM PAGE 1A OFFICER

September 2019 on charges that covered alleged abuse between October 2017 and June 2019.

Plaza solicited a 16- or 17-year-old to engage in sexual activity, according to a copy of his initial criminal complaint. He was accused of asking the child to send him pictures of his genitalia, and on at least one occasion he

made a recording of a juvenile’s genitalia, prosecutors said. He also was accused of sexually abusing a 17-year-old in 2018.

The Fruitland police chief verified at the time of his arrest that Plaza served as a Fruitland reserve police officer from April 2015 to November 2018. He served in full-time police officer capac-

ity for about three months from Nov. 1, 2018, to Feb. 4, 2019, when he was placed back into a reserve officer status because he was unable to meet the minimum fitness standards.

Upon his release from prison, Plaza will be required to register as a sex offender.

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