

THE ASPEN TIMES

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Middle, high schools mark Oct. 26 for return to class

Rick Carroll
The Aspen Times

Aspen middle and high school students now are set to start in-person classes Oct. 26, which marks the beginning of the second quarter.

Reopening the schools the last week of October dovetails with the two schools' quarterly system and will smoothen the transition from remote learning to in-person classes, Superintendent David Baugh said Wednesday.

The opening date is three weeks later than what was established in a plan unveiled to Aspen School District's board of education at its Sept. 21 meeting. The middle school had Oct. 5 marked to reopen, and the high school Oct. 19.

"What we were going to do is completely reshuffle the deck the last three weeks of the quarter and start over in the second quarter," Baugh said. "What makes sense educationally was to keep things intact and make the changes at the end of the quarter."

Middle and high school students will attend classes using a hybrid model; in other words, pupils with surnames starting with A through K will go class for a week starting Oct. 26.

The other cohorts — M through Z — would take class remotely that week and start in-person class the week of Nov. 2. Cohorts at both schools would alternate weeks under the hybrid system.

"We may have to make some micro-adjustments if our classes are uneven," AMS Principal Elizabeth Meador said during a virtual discussion with the middle school community Wednesday.

SCHOOL, A10

INSIDE

Harvesting 2020

With many things changed throughout the state, vineyards are hoping October harvests will put a sweet note onto the end of the year. Read in this week's **Aspen Times Weekly**



A town full of ideas

Aspen community offer suggestions, brainstorm ideas for a successful winter season. **More on PAGE A3**



KELSEY BRUNNER/THE ASPEN TIMES

Workers use a boom to work on the rock fall mesh for mitigation on Independence Pass on Wednesday.

Independence Pass Foundation spends \$100,000 for latest stabilization project

Scott Condon
The Aspen Times

Gravity never gives up. Fortunately, neither does Aspen's Independence Pass Foundation.

IPF is spending \$100,000 this fall in its ongoing effort to stabilize the "Top Cut" on Highway 82 near the summit of Independence Pass.

Under bluebird skies and a light breeze Wednesday about a mile west of the 12,095-foot pass, a truck mounted with what looks like a water canon sprayed a foamy green substance onto the steep hillside.

A combination of wood pulp, organic fertilizer and a mix of wildflower and grass seed was applied along with 20,000 gallons of water on about 1 acre by Powell Restoration Inc., the Commerce City contractor hired by IPF.

The goal of the hydroseeding is to get vegetation to grow on the barren hillside, which is susceptible to erosion.

"The geology here is just crap. It's basically a big pile of gravel," said Mark Fuller, former executive director of IPF and now a consultant on the restoration project.

The Top Cut was created in 1927 when the modern route of Highway 82 was hacked into the landscape. The hillside above the Top Cut has been slowly unraveling ever since, working further and further upslope.

IPF, founded by the late, legendary Aspen

environmentalist Bob Lewis, started work to stabilize the slope in the mid-1990s, often in partnership with the Colorado Department of Transportation.

In one major project, CDOT removed boulders that posed a risk of tumbling off the hillside onto the highway and used them to create a rock retaining wall along about a 400-foot stretch of the Top Cut. Safety is the transportation department's concern. It leaves the revegetation to IPF.

Fuller and IPF executive director Karin Teague pointed out successful work undertaken on the hillside below the highway at the Top Cut starting in the early 2000s. Mesh netting was placed in some areas to stabilize the slope. Countless schoolkids from the Roaring Fork Valley planted seedlings of subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce over the years. At least 80% have survived and helped create a less barren landscape.

CDOT placed thick metal netting on the slope above the Top Cut to prevent rockfall in 2001. Fuller said the netting used to extend about 6 feet above top of the frayed hillside. Erosion over the years has left the top of the netting a few feet below the eroded area.

"It's a tough thing to stop until it reaches the angle of repose," Fuller said.

Teague said: "Gravity just keeps moving on."

IPF applied for a federal grant to undertake the latest revegetation effort, but it failed to score the funds in what was a competitive 2019 cycle. However, IPF's board of directors voted to take advantage of a CDOT closure

INDEPENDENCE, A6

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INDEPENDENCE

From page A1

of Highway 82 this fall to undertake the work. CDOT closed the road between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Wednesday and planned to do the same Thursday for rockfall mitigation.

About one quarter-mile from where the IPF revegetation work was underway on Wednesday, workers for CDOT's contractor used a cherry picker to elevate themselves high up the hillside. They pried loose rocks that posed a threat of natural release, repaired mesh netting damaged by falling rocks and replaced anchors.

"This rockfall mitigation system has aged over time and there is also additional erosion of the slope in this area," said CDOT spokeswoman Elise Thatcher. The work is routine maintenance, she said.

The project has been underway for about three weeks and could continue for another three. CDOT has budgeted \$700,000.

"The final amount depends on how efficiently we can get the work done and whether crews need to bring a helicopter in for part of the work," Thatcher said in

an email.

IPF dipped into its reserve fund and received a large, private donation to undertake its revegetation project. Teague said the \$100,000 job is one of the biggest undertaken by IPF in several years.

"It's a big one, in terms of cost, in terms of preparation," she said.

Many of the contractors who checked out the job passed on a bid due to the complexity of logistics and challenge of spraying the weed mix so high up the hillside, Teague said.

Chaz Audet, a project manager with Powell, said the project wasn't all that daunting. He drove the truck along the closed highway for multiple passes while fellow project manager Todd Sutton sprayed the hillside with the seed, fertilizer and mulch mix.

Audet urged patience for the vegetation to appear. It will likely take until spring 2022 for the seed to take because of the high elevation.

Fuller is eager to see the hillside stabilized.

"It used to be we'd come up here in the spring and scrape three feet of tundra off the road," he said.

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KELSEY BRUNNER/THE ASPEN TIMES

Todd Sutton sprays the side of Independence Pass with colored wood mulch on Wednesday. There are areas of the pass that are being sprayed to help with revegetation of eroded areas.

TOWN HALL

From page A3

summer, but real estate hit a boom with an urban exodus of people from cities buying properties here and making themselves permanent residents.

School enrollment is up, and the amount of toilet flushes is pacing at the same rate as last year, which determines how many people are in town.

Aspen outpaced other mountain resorts in occupancy and the average daily rate of a lodge night is higher than the competition, reported Becky Zimmerman, president of Design Workshop, a firm hired by the city and ACRA to help with the town halls.

"We are coming from a solid foundation," she said about the summer season.

During the town hall, breakout groups chatted about what ideas they had and what ways people want the city and ACRA

to help the community during a winter of COVID-19.

Limits on capacity on local buses and resulting transportation pressures are a big concern among the groups, as is the availability of tests to determine if someone has contracted the disease.

Ideas were floated about how to host events and handle outdoor recreation on trails and dedicated open spaces.

Mayor Torre came up with the term

"connectivities," which are activities for connection.

That could be in the form of parades, heated tents across the city, or volunteerism.

"I was very pleasantly surprised that the groups I was in were being creative, were thinking outside the box and reinforcing a real community ethic in the solutions that they were sharing," Torre said.

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OCTOBER 1: DEMOCRACY AND THE VOTE

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Jena M. Griswold *Colorado Secretary of State*,
Gov. Bill Ritter *Center for the New Energy Economy*

OCTOBER 2: CLIMATE FINANCE SOLUTIONS

Bill Brandt *ASU LightWorks*, Keith Tuffley *CitiBank*,
Mindy Lubber *CERES*

OCTOBER 3: THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

Jeff Orlowski *Director, Social Dilemma*, Chip Comins *AREI*

OCTOBER 4: PEACE OR PIECES

Dr. Jane Goodall *Jane Goodall Institute*,
Jonathan Granoff *Global Security Institute*

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