

LOAN: Program designed to spur employment in Sisters

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Sisters in November 2015 in the former Metabolic Maintenance building on North Pine Street. When they opened their doors, Paul Hodge, one of the owners of the company, and two employees were the only staff. In December 2016 there were four, and currently there are 17 employees in Sisters and one sales representative in New York. Their estimate for a full workforce has increased from 30 to 45 by next summer, creating more employment opportunities for residents of Sisters.

The employee positions include mixing, manufacturing, and packaging. There will be one compliance officer to ensure that Laird is meeting the food safety standards of the Food and Drug Administration. There are also positions in sales and customer service.

Laird plans to be breaking ground in Sisters' light industrial zone in August 2017 for the construction of two buildings — one 15,000 square feet and one 8,000 square feet. The planning

process is already underway with the City. If all goes well, Hodge said they plan to move quickly and anticipate moving into the new facility in December 2017.

"Our long-term goal for the company is to become a well-known trusted food source, similar to the Newman's Own line of products," said Hodge.

They want to be known for providing clean, nutrient-dense products, free of all preservatives and chemicals. Their powdered non-dairy creamer is the only healthy one on the market. All the others contain unhealthy hydrogenated oil.

Laird SuperFood is available here in Sisters at Melvin's Fir Street Market. Hodge said everything is selling so well that he is making deliveries every other day to Melvin's. They are also in 160 grocery stores around the country. However, for the next two to three years, most of their product will be sold online, allowing them to sell at full retail price until they are really well-established.

Laird is currently creating single-serve packets mainly for the hotel market. The hotel at Tetherow in Bend has served as a six-month test model. Further down the road, the possibility of providing product for the food-service



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

City representatives presented a check for \$51,000 to Laird SuperFood last week.

industry will be explored. After accepting both the symbolic and the actual check, Hodge offered his thanks.

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— Paul Hodge

“It is great that a small town like Sisters is willing to do something above and

beyond to bring new business to town,” he said.

Laird had investigated other locations and even found an existing building in Redmond, close to the airport, but they were really committed to building their business in Sisters. The forgivable loan program helped solidify their decision.

“We appreciate all the support we have received from the City of Sisters,” Hodge concluded.

The process involved in the forgivable loan program follows a particular format. If a traded-sector business is approved for a loan and a contract signed between the City and the business, the

loan is funded. The contract states the number of employees expected to be hired and maintained by the end of the loan period. That number of employees is the base on which the loan is formulated.

At the conclusion of the loan period, if that number has not been reached or not maintained, then the company will be required to repay the loan, plus interest, to the City. If they do attain their projected employment numbers and maintain those jobs for the specified number of years, the loan is forgiven. The program was developed as a way to attract businesses providing family-wage jobs to Sisters.

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