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Smoke chokes up Sisters economy

By Cody Rheault
Correspondent

Many Sisters businesses approached the profitable month of August on schedule to see steady business and revenue increases. But the smoke from the Milli Fire — as well as other surrounding wildfires — has obscured what many predicted to be a good season.

Of the many businesses affected by the smoke, the ones focused on outdoor recreation have suffered the most. Rob Malone, director of golf at the Aspen Lakes Golf Course, described how the smoke and air quality has hurt business.

“People have to decide whether to play or not, depending on the smoke and air quality,” he said. “It’s all about the time of day.”

In a sport where mornings are sought after for their cool temperatures and sunrise views, the night-time



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Smoke has impacted everything from outdoor recreation to lodging and dining during the heart of Sisters’ busiest time of year.

inversions have created a morning tee-time deterrent. Afternoons have become the best time to play, after the

smoke has lifted.

Revenue at the Aspen Lakes golf course has declined 30 percent from

last year’s golf season, Malone reported. With July

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Sisters Folk Festival keeps an eye on smoke

Usually when people use the term “smoking” in connection with the Sisters Folk Festival, they’re talking about a particularly hot flatpicker or a set from a lively band like this year’s encore artist The East Pointers.

This year, with something like 500 square miles of Oregon on fire, the term has taken on the unpleasant connotations of poor air quality that threaten the character of the 21st annual event.

As of press time, festival board and staff were closely monitoring conditions and

See **FOLK FESTIVAL** on page 22

Evacuation levels lowered for residents

While Sisters Country continued to live under a pall of smoke over Labor Day Weekend, some residents got a welcome piece of fire-related news. Level 2 evacuation notices were lowered to Level 1 Sunday afternoon, affecting the subdivisions of Crossroads, Edgington/Remunda, Wildwing, Peterson Burn Road area, and along both sides of Three Creek Lake Road south of the Brooks Scanlon Logging Road (FS 4606).

All areas between Highway 20 and Highway 242 west of the city of Sisters, which includes the subdivision of Tollgate and Black Butte Ranch, remain under Level 1 notice. This area does not include the city

of Sisters.

Level 1 means that residents should be aware of fire conditions in their area and be prepared for evacuation should conditions deteriorate.

While it’s hard to tell from Sisters, firefighters have made progress on the 22,527-acre Milli Fire, which is now 60 percent contained. In fact, much of the smoke inundating Sisters has been from other fires; there are dozens burning across hundreds of square miles of the Pacific Northwest.

The east, southeast, and south flanks of the fire are in patrol status with firefighters mopping up any detected heat to further secure containment

See **EVACUATION** on page 28

Road guards inform and protect

By Cody Rheault
Correspondent

As the Milli Fire grew over the past couple weeks, so has the number of road closures. With an increase in closures comes the need to provide security, protection, and information for locals and visitors. And road guards play a key role in this process.

A road closure is put in place when a wildfire poses a threat to residents. And it helps prevent them from accidentally stumbling into firefighting operations. To provide protection and safety, authorities will post people at key points leading to a hazardous area. Law enforcement, ODOT, county road department, or U.S. Forest Service personnel are among those tasked with guarding these roads.



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Susan Skakel mans her post on Forest Road 15, part of the Milli Fire closure area.

During Level 3 evacuations, law enforcement is staffed at roads leading to neighborhoods, ensuring the security of people’s evacuated homes and properties.

The role of a road guard is one of protection and

informing the public. Often times, they are a fire management team’s first level of interaction with the public, and a first line of defense between them and firefighting

See **ROAD GUARDS** on page 9

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