

ECONOMY: Business owners are resilient in face of fire season

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tough spot. According to City leadership at the meeting, the effects vary greatly from business to business, but some companies have noted a 50 percent decrease.

“September is critical for business,” said Sisters Mayor Chuck Ryan. He noted the cancellation of the Folk Festival and smoke from the Milli Fire has deterred customers and diminished what businesses depend on as a profitable season.

“The smoke wasn’t just from our fires though, it was a culmination of many surrounding ones,” he stated. “All of Oregon was impacted.”

Sisters also lies in the wake of negative media influence affecting the economy directly. The steady flow of customers has nearly cut in half as news from neighboring counties cast a grim view of Sisters. Inaccurate signage in the Valley has also been reported, misleading travelers into believing that Central Oregon is inaccessible.

“Some people in Portland don’t know the difference between Highway 242 and 20. So when they hear 242 is closed, they think Sisters is inaccessible,” said Judy Trego, executive director of the Sisters Chamber of Commerce. “We need to get the message out: We are open.”

In an effort to mitigate the negative attention and draw visitors, the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce has increased its efforts in



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Local officials are trying to find ways to mitigate the economic impacts of a tough fire season in Sisters.

advertising. Utilizing radio advertisement in Portland and Bend, and broadcasting TV commercials on two Bend channels, the Chamber is focused on getting the attention back to our community. Drawing in visitors, in hopes of benefiting local businesses, is the Chamber’s priority.

“We want to get the message out: Sisters is here and open for business,” said Trego.

On the list of options for mitigating financial impact is the consideration of a disaster loan through the Small Business Association and Federal Emergency Management Agency. During the Tuesday meeting, members of City government and the Chamber discussed with businesses the option of applying for the loan.

The disaster loan would be assessed as a whole within Deschutes County, not just the town of Sisters. Applications would be assessed at the county level then passed through the Governor’s office. Once approved, it would then be handed over to FEMA for evaluation.

Businesses interested in

applying would be granted a low-interest loan, helping them cover cost deficits incurred over the slow months. At the conclusion of Tuesday’s meeting, six businesses were interested in applying for the loan.

“The loan is positive, marketing is positive, and the meeting was very positive,” said Ryan.

The economic impact of a bad winter and slow summer has brought about a close-knit community as well. The City and Chamber are working closely together in an effort to bring about hope and change for the local economy while encouraging businesses to work together.

“We have not received a ton of calls,” said Ryan, admiring the durability of local businesses. “These people are really resilient. They need our help, but don’t have their hands out.”

Chris Wilder, owner of Sisters Log Furniture and Home Décor and president of the Chamber’s board of directors, admired the sense of community and encouraged the continued support of one another.

“We are truly in this together,” he said.

Families invited to ‘Discover Nature’

The Children’s Forest of Central Oregon, in partnership with the Deschutes National Forest and Bend Park and Recreation District, invites families to explore new ways to connect with the outdoors at the third annual Discover Nature Festival. With more than 35 fun, nature-based activities, the festival offers children and families the opportunity to enjoy time outside together, while engaging in outdoor recreation activities, hands-on learning, games, and more.

The free event is set for Saturday, September 23, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Riverfront Park in Bend.

There will be something fun and engaging for everyone – whether they are active and athletic, curious about the natural world, or want to get

their hands dirty making art. Activities range from a climbing wall and fly fishing, to a bike obstacle course and the firefighter challenge, to live reptiles and amphibians, and story time.

The festival is also a way to learn more about Children’s Forest of Central Oregon, which inspires youth to lead healthy lives and be stewards of public lands through connections with nature. The Children’s Forest is a network of community partners, many of which will be offering activities at the Festival.

Oregon Adaptive Sports will provide adaptive cycling and adaptive kayaking.

For more information on the festival, contact Katie Chipko, executive director at 541-383-5592 or visit www.childrensforestco.org.

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