

Mid-Valley endures freezer shortage due to COVID-19

Increased demand, disrupted supply wreaks havoc in home appliance industry

Capi Lynn
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The standalone freezer in Ellen Kersey's garage suddenly went kaput a couple of weeks ago. No problem. Or so she thought.

The long-time adjunct instructor at Corban University headed for Kelly's, the local appliance dealer where she bought the upright model about five years ago, to shop for a replacement. And then she discovered the unthinkable.

Kelly's had no freezers, not in the showroom, not in any warehouse. It didn't matter that Kersey wasn't choosy and would have settled for any size, any model.

She checked big-box stores and other retailers online, only to get the same answer. There were none.

Half of her and her husband's frozen food stash had to be dumped. The other half went to their son's freezer.

Others are facing similar crises due to a freezer shortage in America.

If you haven't been in the market for one, you probably wouldn't know. But if you think you might need one in the coming months, it might be a good idea to get on a waiting list. Most stores have one because freezers have been on back-order since early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increased demand and disrupted supply chains have wreaked havoc in the home appliance industry.

The supply chain took an initial hit when China, the main supplier of raw material required for kitchen appliances, adopted measures to contain then a still-unknown coronavirus. Major distribution channels would be halted once COVID-19 reached here as production plants had to shut down and revamp assembly lines.

When stay-at-home orders were issued and communities hunkered

down to curb the spread, panicked buyers stocked up on food. Empty shelves in stores meant crowded freezers in homes. Government stimulus checks gave consumers incentive to buy a freezer, a second one or upgrade an old one.

Add the fact that appliance use has increased an estimated 30 percent because people are cooking at home more, and analysts expect product shortages to continue to hinder the industry through the end of the year and perhaps well into next year.

Some vendors are telling local appliance outlets that while trying to fulfill the backlog of orders, they won't be accepting new orders until after June 2021.

"I hope it gets better, but I don't see it happening. The pressure is just not letting up," said Matt Gentle, one of the owners of Stover, Evey and Jackson in Corvallis. "I thought some of it would have been over by now, that somebody would have gotten caught up."

He has nearly 50 customers awaiting freezers. And it's not just freezers anymore. He has a waiting list for dishwashers, too, and refrigerators and ranges are getting tougher to find. He's yet to receive the order of ranges he placed in late May.

Orders start trickling in

It's an unprecedented time in the industry, especially taxing on family-operated stores that have been serving their communities for generations.

Kelly's Appliances opened in 1974 in Salem and now has stores in Corvallis and Eugene.

As Labor Day approaches — traditionally one of its top three busiest sales days of the year — owner Jeff Kelly is optimistic things are beginning to turn around.

He received confirmation on Wednesday, Aug. 19, that an order of 50



A wall where freezers normally are displayed, is now occupied by odds and ends, at Master Appliance in Monmouth. PHOTOS BY BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL

freezers should be in sometime in the next week or so. He said they're not all spoken for, but a downpayment is required to secure one.

"If we had this conversation a month, two months ago, it was a much more grim outlook," Kelly said. "I think we're through the worst."

Eric Coffman, third-generation owner of Master Appliance in Monmouth, hopes so. The demand for freezers in his community picks up around this time of year as people begin to freeze bounty from their gardens and butcher animals from their farms.

All he can do is ask that they be patient. His shop operates factory-direct with major manufacturers such as Whirlpool, Frigidaire and G.E., and he's awaiting back-ordered freezers in almost every size.

Meantime, they're doing more major repairs because customers don't have the option to replace them.

No one saw the shortage coming

The surge in freezer sales happened early in the pandemic and when stores went to replenish their stock, there were none available, and they had no answers for loyal



Master Appliance store, shown here on Thursday, has experienced shortages of freezers since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. It has a group of customers on a waiting list.

customers.

"When somebody comes in and they've got a freezer down and it's full of food they often worked very hard to get, it's really sad to say I don't have anything," Gentle said. "They're in despair, and I feel it. These are people who've done business with us for 40 years, and I have to send them somewhere else."

Aaron Nevel, general manager of Willamette Valley Appliance, estimated his stores in Sherwood and Canby receive around 100 calls a day about freezers. (Its Keizer location closed about a year ago).

He's heard from vendors who won't accept new orders for freezers until after June. His stores have received four in the past six months, but he has at least 20 customers waiting for one.

"Their dates, because they got in five months ago, are expected in November and December," Nevel said.

There has been a silver lining for Willamette Valley Appliance.

"Our service side is actually growing," he said. "We've hired three techs since COVID. I think local stores that don't do service will have a hard time (surviving this)."

The Kerseys are winding up saving money because of the shortage. They're having their broken-down freezer in the garage repaired — for less than it would have cost to buy a new one — and hoping it lasts at least until the supply chain returns to normal.

"Forward This" taps into the heart of the Mid-Valley — its people, history, and issues. Contact columnist Capi Lynn at clynn@StatesmanJournal.com or 503-399-6710, or follow her on Twitter @CapiLynn and Facebook @CapiLynnSJ.

RESTAURANT INSPECTIONS

Continued from previous page

quate, specifically: The kitchen dishwasher sanitizer level is at 0 PPM - no sanitizer residual. **Point deduction: 5.**

Pan Asian Express

Location: 1001 N Arney Road, Suite 626, Woodburn
Date: Aug. 6
Score: 100
No priority violations

Pizza Hut

Location: 244 Main St., Dallas
Date: Aug. 7
Score: 100
No priority violations

Rick's Place Coffee Pushcart

Location: 123 E Main St., Monmouth (mobile unit)
Date: Aug. 2
Score: 100
No priority violations

Shari's Restaurant

Location: 5005 Commercial St. SE, Salem
Date: July 24 (reinspected Aug. 6)
Score: 92
July 24: Priority violations
● Potentially hazardous food is not maintained at proper hot or cold holding temperatures, specifically: Milk in the reach-in refrigerator

atures, specifically: Measured temperature of milk 44°F and chocolate milk 44°F. Gravy hot holding at 100 F. **Point deduction: 5.**

● The use of time as a public health control is not properly monitored, food is not properly marked or written procedures have not been developed, specifically: Shell eggs and pooled eggs (43°F) do not have a written procedure or markers indicating time as a public health control. **Point deduction: 3.**

Aug. 6: No priority violations

Spicee Bite

Location: 4092 State St., Salem (mobile unit)
Date: July 23 (reinspected Aug. 4)
Score: 94
July 23: Priority violations

● (REPEAT) Food-contact surfaces are not clean, specifically: Food debris on stored knives and magnetic knife holder. **Point deduction: 6.**
Aug. 4: No priority violations

Starbucks

Location: 1560 N Pacific Hwy., Woodburn
Date: Aug. 6
Score: 95
Priority violations
● Potentially hazardous food is not maintained at proper hot or cold holding temperatures, specifically: Milk in the reach-in refrigerator

tor is 46°F, 47°F, and 45°F. Ambient air thermometer in the reach-in reads 48°F. **Point deduction: 5.**

Subway

Location: 3912 Center St. NE, Salem
Date: Aug. 3
Score: 95
Priority violations

● The quaternary ammonium sanitizer concentration, pH, or temperature is not adequate, specifically: Quat sanitizer residual dispensing around 100 PPM. **Point deduction: 5.**

Taco Del Mar

Location: 1920 Turner Road SE, Suite C, Salem
Date: Aug. 4
Score: 97
Priority violations

● Food-contact surfaces are not clean, specifically: Dark buildup on can opener and can opener blade. **Point deduction: 3.**

Taste of a Fair – Elephant Ears

Location: 2330 17th St. NE, Salem (mobile unit)
Date: Aug. 6
Score: 100
No priority violations

Taste of a Fair – Hot dog cart

Location: 2330 17th St. NE, Salem (mobile unit)
Date: Aug. 6
Score: 100
No priority violations

Taste of a Fair – Roadhouse

Location: 2330 17th St. NE, Salem (mobile unit)
Date: Aug. 6
Score: 100
No priority violations

Two Hearts Bistro

Location: 380 High St. NE, Salem
Date: Aug. 5
Score: 100
No priority violations

Due to the holiday, our office hours and obituary placement times may vary.

Please contact us at 503-399-6789 or obituary@statesmanjournal.com for further details.

CROWN

MEMORIAL CENTERS • CREMATION & BURIAL

Simplicity - Convenience - Low Cost

Simple Cremation \$795
Simple Direct Burial \$995
Church Funeral \$2965

SALEM 275 Lancaster Drive SE (503) 581-6265	TUALATIN 8970 SW Tualatin Sherwood Rd (503) 885-7800
PORTLAND 832 NE Broadway (503) 783-3393	TIGARD 12995 SW Pacific Hwy (503) 783-6869
EASTSIDE 1433 SE 122nd Ave (503) 783-6865	MILWAUKIE 16475 SE McLoughlin Blvd (503) 653-7076

Privately owned cremation facility. A Family Owned Oregon Business.

"Easy Online Arrangements"

www.CrownCremationBurial.com

OR-GC0348841-02