

# Wildhorse Casino and Resort: 'Jobs plentiful, candidates scarce'

By Antonio Sierra  
East Oregonian

On Wednesday, Wildhorse Casino and Resort sent out a press release that would have been unfathomable 10 years ago: dozens of jobs are available and Wildhorse and the rest of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation was having trouble filling them.

In a press releases entitled "Jobs plentiful, candidates scarce," Wildhorse states that the low unemployment rate "translates to headaches for recruiters and business owners in Mission, Pendleton, and across the country."

At more than 1,700 employees, the CTUIR is the second largest employer in Umatilla County, which is currently sporting a 4.5 percent unemployment rate.

According to the press release, the CTUIR and its various enterprises had 66 job vacancies as of mid-August, ranging from bus driv-

ers to archaeologists.

In a statement, Wildhorse employment manager Dorothy Cyr said passing a background check can be a barrier for some candidates while also pointing to local housing shortages.

"While it's certainly good that jobs are plentiful and the economy is improving, finding qualified employees to fill the positions created by that growing economy is an arduous task," the press release states.

In an interview, Wildhorse human resources director Lorena Thompson said as many as 5 percent of applicants will not pass the gaming background check.

The CTUIR isn't the only employer looking for hired help.

Mid Columbia Bus Co. has a 15-20 percent turnover rate every year and is in constant need of bus drivers. Top Pendleton employers like Keystone RV and Hill Meat are also

consistently advertising for unfilled jobs.

Despite the current surplus of jobs, Dallas Fridley, a regional economist for the Oregon Employment Department, said Umatilla County's employment rate has been slower to fall post-recession than the rest of the state as job growth has been offset by events like the closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot. Currently, Umatilla County's unemployment rate is about a half-point under the state's average. Additionally, a low unemployment rate in Umatilla County hasn't equaled a dramatic increase in wages.

According to the Oregon Employment Department, private sector wages in Umatilla County rose from an average of \$36,105 in 2018, only a 3.8 percent increase.

When the public sector is added, wages have risen by a slightly more robust 5 percent, but both figures don't match the inflationary rate,

which rose 6 percent during that time period.

Umatilla County was outpaced by the state in both overall wages and its rate of growth, with overall wages rising from \$46,896 to 51,117, a 10 percent increase.

Fridley said the overall economic outlook looks good for Umatilla County. Due to a combination of a younger and more diverse workforce and strong agriculture and food processing industries, Fridley anticipates the unemployment rate should stay low.

And if that is the case, Fridley thinks the pressure on wages should mean local residents should see their paychecks start to rise.

Thompson, the Wildhorse HR director, said the company evaluates wages each year to see how they correspond with the Oregon minimum wage and the pay at other American Indian casinos and often raises payrates as a result.

## OREGON IN BRIEF

from staff reports

### Oregon county gets new morgue years after mass shooting

ROSEBURG — A rural southern Oregon county has a new morgue facility, three years after its two-body capacity became an issue following a mass shooting at the local community college.

The News-Review reports that Douglas County's new morgue in Roseburg has expanded its capacity for investigating deaths by 10-fold.

Douglas County's Chief Medical Legal Death Investigator Craig Kinney said he vowed see changes following the 2015 mass shooting at Umpqua Community College, which left the gunman and nine others dead.

The county successfully bypassed funding hurdles in part because of the shooting response.

It now has an \$11,500 walk-in cooler to support the county's 400-plus body count case load each year.

### Wildfires cost Oregon Shakespeare Festival \$2 million

ASHLAND — Wildfires have cost the Oregon Shakespeare Festival \$2 million in lost revenue because of smoky conditions.

The Daily Tidings reported Friday that the well-known festival in Ashland, Oregon is also canceling its free, outdoor Green Show performances for the rest of the season.

Since mid-July, the majority of the Green Show performances have been cancelled or moved to another location.

During that same period, more than 20 performances of the festival's three outdoor plays have either been canceled or moved indoors to Ashland High School's smaller theater.

### Wyoming man drowns in Oregon canoe accident

BEND — An 84-year-old Wyoming man drowned and his daughter, a former Paralympic athlete, was injured when their canoe capsized in Oregon and they were swept over Class 5 rapids.

Deschutes County sheriff's Lt. Bryan Husband told KTVZ-TV on Friday Ronald Stevens, of Jackson, Wyoming, was pulled unconscious from the water by kayakers.

Nancy Stevens, who is blind, was also pulled from the Deschutes River by kayakers and is hospitalized in good condition.

The 54-year-old Nancy Stevens competed 20 years ago as a cross-country skier in the Nagano, Japan Paralympic Games.

The Bulletin reports she was also the first blind woman to scale the 13,770-foot Grand Teton and has been a regular Pole Pedal Paddle competitor since 2013.

The two were fly-fishing and were both wearing life jackets.




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