

MAY

Market Place reaches 90 days with closed doors

By **Cherise Kaechele**
The Observer, May 2

The 90-day mark of the grocery store that was the subject of a number of headlines in 2018 came and went and the store remains dark.

On Feb. 1, a sign on the doors of the corner grocery store on Adams Avenue read the store is in “transition.” The owner, Troy Berglund, had since filed for bankruptcy, according to Kavanaugh. Going through bankruptcy court went slower than expected and the doors will be closed for a while longer, he said.

Kavanaugh continued to be hopeful that the store will open eventually.

“We just can’t be specific on a timeline,” Kavanaugh said. “They have secured partners — both for investors and grocers, though.”

The Market Place had made headlines before the store announced its temporary closure in February. Rennie, who was the operator

of the store, held a community meeting and conducted surveys of customers, asking what the town wanted from its neighborhood grocery store.

Adelsberger, the developer of the store, and Rennie, openly admitted the store did not have the right products to cater to the community from the very beginning. The store struggled to build up its customer base without the right products and was not making its revenue goal from the start.

Many of the surveyors said they expected the Market Place to have items that customers couldn’t find at Walmart or Safeway. Instead, they found the same brands for the same, or higher, costs.

Most of the survey responses indicated the store was too expensive.

Rennie said he wanted to do what the community was asking for and will work toward getting the right fit. Rennie said in February that they are looking to get a

wholesaler who will supply them with the correct items.

“We have the right people who are willing to open the grocery store (if they have) the right products,” Kavanaugh said in a previous interview. “That corner where the grocery store is has to be successful. We need to have a grocery store in there with the products the community wants.”

Strope said the loan was not in default and the loan remained in effect despite the store closing its doors temporarily.

There are guidelines the store has to meet in order for the loan to become a grant. According to the original loan agreement, the store was required to maintain 10 full-time jobs at \$15 an hour and five part-time jobs over a five-year period, according to a draft outlining requirements. The store was also required to be open at least five days a week for 52 weeks a year for five years.

Per the agreement with



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

The Market Place grocery store reached 90 days with closed doors following a bankruptcy. The space still planned to reopen with a different store.

the URA, up to \$100,000 of the principal loan will be forgiven each year if the standards are met. However, if the store is less than 90 percent compliant with store hour and job creation standards, the principal for

that year will not be forgiven and the interest rate will double to 10 percent. “Non-performing years can be ‘made up’ to maximum performance timeline of 10 years but total forgiveness cannot exceed \$100,000 in

any year,” according to the contract.

Strope said in a previous interview, once a new grocery store is established in that building, the clock will restart for the first year’s requirements.

Lesley Kopp death investigation concluded

■ **Woman found at local business died of apparent suicide**

By **Cherise Kaechele**
The Observer, May 4

Lesley Kopp, 67, of Cove, who was found dead at 1902 Fourth St. on April 19, died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, according to police.

Initially, investigators used the word ‘homicide’ to describe the case. La Grande Police Chief Brian Harvey said that is a technical term used when someone dies an “unnatural death.”

“It’s used when there’s an unattended death — someone who has died who was not under the care of medically trained staff,” Harvey said.

Additionally, Harvey said, the way Kopp was found, law enforcement could not determine the cause of death initially.

“We couldn’t tell what we had until very far into the investigation,” he said.

A press release from the La Grande Police Department stated that James Kopp, an orthopedic surgeon whose office is in the Fourth Street building, reported his wife missing the night of April 18 at 8:26 p.m.

He reported he had not seen his wife since 9:30 a.m. that morning and was told by an employee that Lesley had left work sometime around 2:30 p.m. She had not been seen or heard from since.

Union County Sheriff’s Office deputies took the missing persons report and began an investigation. The deputies found

her vehicle in the parking lot near the business. Deputies and officers from the La Grande Police Department were unable to locate Lesley in the area of the business.

The next morning, James found his wife deceased inside the building. She was found in the basement in a private and secluded area of the building that only a few employees of the business had access to, according to Harvey.

Harvey said the unusual set of circumstances surrounding the death called for the major crimes team to join the investigation.

Lesley being reported as a missing person is one of the things that made this case out of the ordinary, Harvey said.

Secondly, the location she was found at added to the complexity.

“It’s more common for people to commit suicide at their homes or in the woods,” Harvey told The Observer. “This was a little used area in the basement.”

That also would have impacted the timeline of when Lesley’s body was found, he said.

Investigators obtained surveillance videos from multiple sources and were able to determine Lesley had left in her vehicle from the office and returned within a few minutes to the back door of the building toward the basement with a sack in one hand.

After a thorough evaluation, police believe Lesley died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The evidence also made it clear that Lesley died at the location she was found, according to the release.

North Powder School District celebrates ground breaking of school, gym

■ **School administrators celebrate beginning of multi-million dollar project**

By **Dick Mason**
The Observer, May 4

NORTH POWDER — Justin Bingham, chair of the North Powder School Board, made a masterful understatement on May 2.

Bingham, speaking at the groundbreaking ceremony for perhaps the biggest construction project in his school district’s history, refrained from the use of hyperbole.

“This is kind of a big deal,” Bingham said of the \$6.4 million building project for a new high school classroom building and gym.

The construction will be funded with money from a \$3 million bond North Powder School District voters approved a year ago, a \$3 million matching grant from the state and \$400,000 from the school district.

Bingham said many people in the community deserve credit for getting the bond approved by voters, including the members of a local political action committee for facilities.

“I don’t know if the bond would have passed without their work,” Bingham said.

He said the project is a credit to how deeply the residents of North Powder care about their community.

Matt McElligott, a former member of North Powder School Board, is among those who began trying



Dick Mason/The Observer

Lance Dixon, superintendent of North Powder School District, speaks at a groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the new high school classroom building and gym on May 2.

to get the school district to pursue getting a bond passed for a building project after moving here about a dozen years ago. He recalled he was struck by the antiquated nature of Powder Valley High School’s gym during the first game he attended there.

“I didn’t know that gyms like that were still around,” said McElligott, who was chair of the school board when voters approved the bond.

Like Bingham, McElligott praised the community for rising to the occasion.

“The whole community came together to make this happen,” McElligott said.

He said maintaining a strong school district is critical to the health of any community.

“If you don’t have a school shortly thereafter you won’t have a community,” McElligott said.

Lance Dixon, superintendent of the North Powder School District, said

“The whole community came together to make this happen,”

— **Matt McElligott, a former member of North Powder School Board**

the gym and high school should be completed in a year. The company hired for the job is McCormack Contracting out of Pendleton.

“Their target date is next May. We will be moved in by the start of the 2019-20 school year,” Dixon said.

The high school classroom building will replace Powder Valley High School’s current classroom building, which was constructed more than 100 years ago. Dixon said the school district will begin discussing what will be done with the old high school building after the new one is built.

Powder Valley High School’s current gym, built in the late 1930s, will continue to be used for

team practices and other activities after the new one is built. The old gym received extensive seismic upgrade work a year ago with funding from a state grant of about \$600,000.

The new high school and gym will be west of the present high school and gym. The new high school building will have 12 classrooms, including a science room, which will include special tables with natural gas hook ups for a science lab.

There will also be an art room with a kiln, and a life skills room filled with appliances for home economics classes and a resource room for students to learn how to be more independent.

“We need to be here for all children,” Dixon said. “This is huge.”



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