

Small-business & Ag

HAPPENINGS

USDA launches second round of trade mitigation payments

USDA launched the second and final round of trade mitigation payments aimed at assisting farmers suffering from damage due to unjustified trade retaliation by foreign nations. Producers of certain commodities will now be eligible to receive Market Facilitation Program payments for the second half of their 2018 production. USDA's Farm Service Agency administers the MFP program, which provides payments to almond, cotton, corn, dairy, hog, sorghum, soybean, fresh sweet cherry and wheat producers. The MFP sign-up period runs through Jan. 15, with information and instructions provided at www.farmers.gov/mfp. Producers must complete an application by Jan. 15 but have until May 1 to certify their 2018 production. For further information or to locate and contact local FSA offices, interested producers can visit www.farmers.gov.

Baker County Chamber plans awards banquet

BAKER CITY — The 89th annual Baker County Chamber Awards Banquet is planned for Jan. 19 at the Baker Elks Lodge #338, 1896 Second St., Baker City. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., and the event ends at 8:30 p.m. Every year the Baker County Chamber of Commerce strives to recognize the members of the community who go above and beyond in their dedication and contributions to Baker County. The event recognizes eight different individuals, businesses or organizations and celebrates the men and women who work in public service. For tickets and more information, contact the Baker County Chamber and Visitor Bureau at 541-523-5855 or info@visitbaker.com or stop by 490 Campbell St., Baker City.

Three-part project aims to aid women in agriculture

Women entrepreneurs face significant challenges in accessing funding, training and business support. To help bridge these gaps the Oregon Department of Agriculture is partnering with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Foundation and the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The goal of the three-part project is to offer women who own or operate farms, ranches and food or beverage businesses a hand up so they can grow and succeed. "We need the public's help in finding women to participate and compete in this agribusiness program," said ODA Director Alexis Taylor. "These are real dollars, skills and training that can help women launch or scale-up their farm, food or beverage business in Oregon. I encourage women to apply and be a part of this valuable experience."

To determine what women in Oregon and Washington need, the NASDA Foundation launched an online survey in early December. The responses will inform the training and the development of a women's business accelerator program due to launch in the fall/winter 2019. Women who own a farm/ranch or a farm-based food business in Oregon are asked to complete the survey at www.women-in-ag.questionpro.com through Jan. 31. In an effort to recruit women the NASDA Foundation is sponsoring a Women Farm to Food Business Competition. Women from Oregon and Washington will compete for a total of \$40,000 in funds to launch, grow or scale their business. The competition opened Jan. 1. Finalists will attend the NASDA Winter Policy Conference in February in Arlington, Virginia. To apply online, go to www.nasda.org/foundation/women-in-agriculture.

A business accelerator program is also planned. For more information, contact Amy Gilroy at agilroy@oda.state.or.us or 503-872-6600.

Annual meeting set for Oregon mint growers

SALEM — The Oregon Essential Oil Growers League's 70th annual meeting is scheduled for Jan. 10-11 at the Salishan Resort in Gleneden Beach. The Oregon Essential Oil Growers League is composed of more than 350 mint growers, researchers and supplier members. Subjects to be discussed include gene mapping and biotechnology in mint; chemical registrations and national research; the impacts on managing mint stills with the food safety modernization act; and advancements in managing weeds in mint. For

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MINIMUM WAGE

Retailers are hoping

HIGHER PAY

brings

BETTER WORKERS



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Top photo: A Walmart worker collects shopping carts in New Jersey. Bottom photo: An employee organizes crates at an Amazon fulfillment center in Grapevine, Texas. Both Amazon and Walmart have raised its minimum wages recently. The retail workers have enjoyed some of the best wage gains in 2018 — with a 4.3 percent increase.

By Christopher Rugaber and Anne D’Innocenzio, The Associated Press

America’s retailers, struggling to fill jobs, have been raising pay to try to keep and attract enough employees. Now, some stores want something in return: A more efficient worker.

To that end, retailers, fast food restaurants and other lower-wage employers are boosting investment in technology and redesigning stores. Walmart is automating its truck unloading to require fewer workers on loading docks. Kohl’s is using more hand-held devices to speed check-outs and restock shelves. McDonald’s is increasingly replacing cashiers with self-service kiosks to free up workers for table service.

Retail workers, though comparatively low-paid, have enjoyed some of the best wage gains in the past year. Their hourly pay rose 4.3 percent in November from a year earlier — much faster than such higher-wage industries as manufacturing, where pay rose 1.8 percent.

Walmart raised its starting pay to \$11 an hour this year. Target’s minimum is \$12, with plans to make it \$15 by 2020. Amazon’s starting wage leapt to \$15 in November. And more than 20 states have

raised minimum wages above the federal \$7.25 an hour. California and Washington state’s wage floors reached \$12 on Jan. 1. New York’s rose to \$11.80.

Even as they’ve absorbed higher labor costs, most retailers remain reluctant to pass them on to customers in the form of price increases. American consumers have grown increasingly insistent on bargain prices — in part a hangover from the Great Recession, in part a function of online price-comparison tools. Retailers are loath to alienate them and send them looking for alternative sellers.

“It’s extraordinarily hard for retailers to systematically raise prices,” said Jason Goldberg, chief commerce strategy officer at Publicis Communications NA, a digital consulting agency. “These days, everyone’s prices are way more transparent. It’s just one click away from your super computer in your pocket.”

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UC Chamber welcomes new board members

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — The Union County Chamber of Commerce announced the addition of four new members of its board of directors: Brent Clapp, Sherry Haeger, Brent Huntsman and Shawn Risteene. The board provides leadership to carry out the Chamber’s mission to promote commerce in Union County. For more information, call the Chamber at 541-963-8588 or stop by 207 Depot St., La Grande.

Brent Clapp, Brent Clapp Media Services

Brent was born in Casper, Wyoming. His family owned a



Clapp

small business and he was constantly around farming and ranching. He had a religious upbringing and started singing when he was about 5 years old. Brent attended Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho, and graduated with a degree in philosophy and religion. During college and beyond Brent traveled with semi-pro singing groups.

After graduating, Brent was a professional photographer/producer and went on to be a youth/music pastor and senior pastor

for nearly 15 years. You can find Brent throughout our community with his local businesses, Brent Clapp Media Services and LaGrandeAlive.TV.

Sherry Haeger, Heart 'n Home Hospice and Palliative Care

Sherry was born and raised in Sacramento, California, the daughter of a self-employed contractor who taught her hard work, diligence and honesty. She has three grown children who have blessed her with seven grandchildren.

In 2003, Sherry moved to the



Haeger

Silicon Valley to further her career in the tech industry for Apple and Google. Sherry was offered a position in sales and marketing with Heart 'n Home Hospice and Palliative Care and moved to the Grande Ronde Valley in early 2018 with the goal of slowing down her life.

She is happy to call Cove her home and the people of this valley are her passion.

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‘Business Foundations’ series offered free to existing, potential entrepreneurs

Observer staff

BAKER CITY, LA GRANDE, ENTERPRISE — Northeast Oregon Economic Development District is offering its six-week Business Foundations workshop series to help entrepreneurs and small-business owners build the basis for a successful enterprise. The series will begin this month in Baker City, La Grande and Enterprise.

The workshop series is led by Lisa Dawson, who has taught the hands-on course for more than 10 years. Classes will cover the basics of running a successful business — overhead and inventory costs, setting goals and projecting sales, marketing, taxes and licensing, and other consider-

ations — and bring it all together in a business plan.

Thanks to a Community Development Block Grant through the City of La Grande, the classes are offered free of charge. Classes will be held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. in each location

- Baker City: Wednesdays, Jan. 16, 23, 30; Feb. 6, 13, 27 (no class Feb. 20) — at Launch Pad Baker, 2019 Main St.
- La Grande: Thursdays, Jan. 17, 24, 31; Feb. 7, 14, 28 (no class Feb. 21) — at IGNITE, 104 Depot St.
- Enterprise: Tuesdays, Jan. 22, 29; Feb. 5, 12, 26 (no class Feb. 19); and March 5 — at Building Healthy Families, 207 E Park St.

The six-session series will cover the following topics: Gaining Perspective (consider your business concept), Laying the Foundation (define your line of business and analyze financial essentials, from overhead costs to break-even point), Getting Into the Flow (the financial essentials of cash flow, sales forecasting and financial documents), Mission and Markets (revisit mission, discuss market research and identify competitors in order to align with target markets), Get the Word Out (discuss creative marketing strategies and give peer feedback on marketing materials), and Good-bye and Good Luck (present your business plan, share final pitch and plan

for next steps).

Seating is limited, and the registration deadline is Jan. 11. To register, go to www.ignite-mybusiness.org/en/events, call the NEOEDD office at 541-426-3598 (or 800-645-9454) or email kristyathens@neoedd.org. Preference is made to people with low-to-moderate incomes; income verification is required.

The Northeast Oregon Economic Development District’s mission is to provide resources and facilitate quality decision-making for the benefit of entrepreneurs, businesses and communities in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties. Learn more about our programs and business support at www.neoedd.org.