

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Get your holiday marketing plan in order

LA GRANDE — Local business owners and managers are invited to attend “Spruce Up Your Holiday Marketing Plan,” a free Google webinar, from noon to 1 p.m. Nov. 12 at the Ignite E-Center, 104 Depot St., La Grande. Topics will include: Google My Business listings, online advertising and email marketing. According to organizers, the workshop will be “jam-packed with good information. Come ready to take notes.”

The holiday marketing workshop is hosted by La Grande Main Street Downtown, Ignite and the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District. There is no cost to attend, but reservations are appreciated. For more information, go to www.ignitemybusiness.org.

Oregon Farm Bureau comments on Walden's retirement

SALEM — The Oregon Farm Bureau released a statement on Oct. 28 following the announcement that Congressman Greg Walden will not seek a new term in Congress in the 2020 election.

“It goes without saying, and as many in the Farm Bureau family already know, Greg has been a stalwart champion for Oregon agriculture,” the OFB statement said. “For us, Congressman Walden will be forever synonymous with Congressional District 2. We applaud and thank Greg for his tireless years in public service and wish him the very best in his next chapter.”

Holiday open house includes snow safety and snowshoe clinic

LA GRANDE — Blue Mountain Outfitters, 1124 Adams Ave., La Grande, is having holiday open house beginning at 6 p.m. Nov. 13. The event will include drinks from Side A Brewing, food from JaxDog Cafe, special deals and giveaways. In addition, the Wallowa Avalanche Center will give a free a snow safety and snowshoe clinic.

Northwest Farm Credit Services reports third-quarter earnings

SPOKANE, Washington — Northwest Farm Credit Services, an agricultural lending cooperative, announced 2019 third-quarter earnings of \$73.4 million, compared to \$76.0 million for the same quarter of 2018. Total capital increased 4.1% during the first nine months of the year to \$2.6 billion.

“Our financial performance in 2019 remains strong and on track with our expectations,” said Phil DiPofi, president and CEO. “The majority of our customers across the Pacific Northwest are experiencing a reasonable year despite pockets of continuing trade, political and weather-related challenges.”

Earnings for the nine months ended Sept. 30, 2019, were \$206.7 million compared to \$220.5 million for the same period of the prior year. The nine months ended Sept. 30, 2018, included an additional patronage distribution from CoBank and a larger refund of premiums previously paid to the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation, which were the primary contributors to the change in net income.

Northwest FCS is a \$12 billion financial cooperative providing financing and related services to farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, commercial fishermen, timber producers, rural homeowners and crop insurance customers in Montana, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Alaska. Northwest FCS is a member of the nationwide Farm Credit System that supports agriculture and rural communities with reliable, consistent credit and financial services. For more information, go to www.northwestfcs.com.

List of Oregon's top 20 agricultural commodities released

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Agriculture announced a list of the state's top 20 agricultural commodities in 2018. Greenhouse and nursery products remain Oregon's leading agricultural commodity with an annual value of nearly \$1 billion based on data collected by ODA. Sources of data include USDA National Agricultural Statistic Service, Oregon State University, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Wine Board. This is an increase for Oregon's greenhouse and nursery industry up from \$94.7 million last

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Sabrina Thompson/EO Media Group

The La Grande Growing Wise storefront is open for business on the corner of Adams Avenue and Chestnut Street while construction continues in the back to build a workshop for people to create their own bath and soap products.

Where's Growing Wise?

By Sabrina Thompson
EO Media Group

Growing Wise has had several homes since it opened nearly six years ago. What was once a home-based business now has two locations, one in Union and in a new storefront on the corner of Adams Avenue and Chestnut Street in La Grande at 1019 Adams Ave. Owned and operated by husband and wife duo Aaron and Jennifer Wise, the business specializes in natural handcrafted soap and skin care products.

The business came about due to allergies to chemicals for Jennifer and her children, she said. To prevent them from breaking out with rashes and blisters, Jennifer wanted to find safe alternatives for lotions and bath products. As she gathered recipes from friends and family, she found she had a passion and a knack for making these products.

“It grew into this curiosity of what I can make and what others want me to make,” Jennifer said.

Jennifer took her products to the La Grande Farmers Market for a few years to sell and gain feedback on the products. When she saw there was enough of a local demand, she and her husband opened up the initial location for Growing Wise at 1012 Adams Ave. Within a few years, the store moved to Second and Adams before relocating to the Foley Building. After temporarily



Sabrina Thompson/EO Media Group

Wife and husband duo Jennifer and Aaron Wise own and operate Growing Wise.

ily taking over 208 Chestnut St., the store moved into its current location at the corner of Adams and Chestnut.

In mid-May 2019, Jennifer and Aaron also opened up a store in Union, which includes a restaurant, Union Fountain.

“The good news is (our customers) have found us no matter where we have gone,” Jennifer said. “We’ve kind of turned into a joke at this point. It’s like ‘Where’s Waldo?’ but it’s ‘Where’s Growing Wise?’ But it is a blessing to see that support.”

Having two spaces has been the biggest challenge, according to Jennifer. While she tends to the store in La Grande, Aaron runs the restaurant in Union.

Both are open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday to allow them to have time to be with their children and focus on their family in addition to running their business. The couple is adding new members to their team with the addition of three employees to help keep things running smoothly. However, Jennifer said, they are very selective and the person who joins needs to be the right fit.

“We want someone who understands it is more than just creating,” Jennifer said. “There are so many small details that go into running a business. Like things with the computer and customer service. It is like trying to find a unicorn. But the people

we have now are really great.”

The store in La Grande is currently open while the back goes through construction to build a workshop space. Once completed, Jennifer said, Growing Wise will be partnering with Art Center East to host classes and house products for people to make their own soaps, bath bombs, fragrances and other items. The couple hopes the workshop will be completed by the end of the month.

Growing Wise also works to support local artists, selling their handmade items such as cards and accessories like jewelry and purses.

“Small-town people appreciate

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Employers and employees: Be a problem solver

By Greg Smith

Every customer who comes into your business has a problem and is looking for you to help solve it.

Perhaps they need a dress for their daughter's wedding or a special gift. They have a flat tire or need a specific tool for a project. Their faucet is dripping, their pickup's engine light came on, their septic tank needs pumped, they need a loan to buy a house, or they are being sued.

What problem does your business solve and how do you accomplish this more effectively than your competitors? Have you thought about this and do you need to make any adjustments?

Here are some basic things you many want to consider:

Are you open when your customer needs you? (I know of a hairstylist who works only in the evenings and on Saturday and Sunday because that's when her clients are

available and it is something her competitors won't do.)

Do you offer quality products or services at the right price point?

Is your website complicated? (Remember, if it takes more than three “clicks” to find the information customers want to know, they will leave your site — and likely won't return.)

When a customer calls is there a complex automated system they must navigate?

In short, is it a hassle to do business with you or are you the first business they turn to when seeking an answer to their problem?

The answers to these questions sound simple yet are often the root cause for slow — or no — business.

On the other side of the equation, employers want employees who are problem solvers, not problem creators. The importance of “soft skills” cannot be overstated. Employees, regardless of their skill set, are not employed long if they create problems. The No. 1 complaint (i.e., problem) I consistently hear about from employers is they cannot find

people who want to work and who will show up to work on time — or at all.

Perhaps you don't consider yourself a problem creator, but take a moment and ask yourself these questions:

Are you dependable?

Do you cause strife in the workplace?

Are you busy texting instead of looking around to see what needs to be done — and doing it?

Do you complete your work on time? Does your boss have to come behind you and double-check to make sure the task has been done correctly?

Do you access resources to answer the questions you might have, or do you consistently interrupt the workflow of others?

Identifying a need whether as a business owner or employee and utilizing your unique skill set is one of the most important keys to success, profitability and longevity in the workplace. Being a creative problem solver is not just something beneficial in the workplace, but in society as well.

