Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Skip-Line under new ownership

LA GRANDE — La Grande-based Skip-Line Inc., a leading manufacturer of equipment and technology for the pavement marking industry, has a new owner.

Spec-Rite, a limited-liability transportation safety, data and software company formed in 2018 in Adams Center, New York, recently announced it purchased Skip-Line, which turned 50 in 2019.

"This transaction will allow Spec-Rite to deliver its pavement marking management software to the highway markets using Skip-Line's family of products and market reach," according to the statement from Spec-Rite. "The synergies from this transaction will also accelerate 'smart' products to market from Skip-Line, which improve the application and management of pavement markings for human and machine vision."

The announcement also stated Skip-Line will continue to operate from 10514 N McAlister Road, La Grande. Skip-Line President Brian Kausler stated the move allows the local business to better meet the needs of customers.

"Skip-Line has developed so many great relationships over the years, we can't wait to give our industry friends and partners more tools to succeed in making roadways safer," according to Kausler.

Free QuickBooks class held Feb. 22

LA GRANDE — Locals can take a free class on the accounting software package QuickBooks.

Eastern Oregon University's Small Business Development Center is offering the free introduction to QuickBooks on Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon, in room 147 of the Integrated Services Building, 607 Gekeler Lane, La Grande.

The instructor is Diana Bautista, a senior accounting student at Eastern Oregon University. The class requires pre-registration by calling 541-962-1532 or emailing eousbdc@gmail.com.

Farm Bureau celebrates women's contributions to agriculture

SALEM — Oregon ranks fourth in the nation for the number of farmers and ranchers who are women, according to the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture (2017), reported in a press release from the Oregon Farm Bureau.

There are 29,868 female farmers and ranchers in Oregon, representing 44% of the state's agricultural community. Nationally, 36% of all U.S. farmers and ranchers are female, according to the census.

To celebrate women's contributions to Oregon agriculture — and the impact of public policy on all farm and ranch families — the Oregon Farm Bureau Women's Advisory Council hosted a reception for lawmakers and the general public at the state capitol on Monday, the first day of the 2020 Oregon Legislative Short Session.

"Farm Bureau members will be at the capitol to remind lawmakers their decisions directly impact our ability to grow crops, raise animals, contribute to the economy, and stay viable and sustainable for the next generation," OFB Women's Advisory Council Chair Janice Flegel, who runs a cattle and hay ranch with her family in Crook County, stated in the release.

"Women play an essential role on Oregon's farms and ranches in every capacity, as owner-operators, as bookkeepers, as mothers, and as advocates for agriculture in the Legislature."

Chinatopix via AP

A volunteer stands in front of a Communist Party flag as he takes the temperature of a scooter driver Monday at a roadside checkpoint in Hangzhou in eastern China's Zhejiang Province. China sent medical workers and equipment to a newly built hospital, infused cash into financial markets and further restricted people's movement in sweeping new steps Monday to contain the coronavirus.

Virus impacting business

By Paul Wiseman and Anne D'Innocenzio
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hyundai Motors is suspending production in South Korea, a sign that the economic fallout from China's viral outbreak is spreading.

For other companies bracing for losses from coronavirus, the damage has so far been delayed, thanks to a stroke of timing: The outbreak hit just when Chinese factories and many businesses were closed anyway to let workers travel home for the weeklong Lunar New Year holiday .

But the respite won't last.

If much of industrial China remains on lockdown for the next few weeks, a very real possibility, Western retailers, auto companies and manufacturers that depend on Chinese imports will start to run out of the goods they depend on.

In order to meet deadlines for summer goods, retail experts say that Chinese factories would need to start ramping up production by March 15. If Chinese factories were instead to remain idle through May 1, it would likely cripple retailers' crucial back-to-school and fall seasons.

"There's complete uncertainty," said Steve Pasierb, CEO of the Toy Industry Association. "This could be huge if it goes on for months."

Wuhan, the Chinese city where the outbreak hit hardest, is a center of automotive production. It's been closed off, along with neighboring cities, isolating more than 50 million people and bringing factories to a standstill.

So far, U.S. automakers haven't had to curb production for want of Chinese parts. But David Closs, professor emeritus at Michigan State University's Department of Supply Chain Management, said the clock is ticking.

"I would say it's weeks at the most," Closs said. "One to two to three weeks."

Hyundai said Tuesday that it was suspending production in South Korea "due to disruptions in the supply of parts resulting from the coronavirus outbreak in China" and that it "was seeking alternative suppliers in other regions."

The partial shutdown of Wuhan has already harmed the production of TV display panels and raised prices, according to a report by research group IHS Markit. The city has five factories making liquid crystal displays, known as LCDs, and organic light-emitting diodes, known as OLEDs, both of which are used for television and laptop monitors. China accounts for more than half of the global production capacity for making these display panels.

David Hsieh, an analyst at IHS Markit, said in a report that "these factories are facing shortages of both labor and key components as a result of mandates designed to limit the contagion's spread," leading suppliers to raise panel prices more aggressively.

Phone-maker Motorola, which has a facility in Wuhan, said that so far, it expects little impact because it has a flexible global supply chain and multiple factories around the world. Its priority has been the welfare of local employees, Motorola, which is owned by the Chinese electronics giant Lenovo, said in a statement.

Apple CEO Tim Cook told analysts last week that the company's contractors in China had been forced to delay reopening factories that closed for the Lunar New Year holiday. Cook said the company is seeking ways to minimize supply disruptions. Some of its suppliers are in Hubei, the Chinese province at the center of the outbreak. Most of Apple's iPhones and other devices are made in China.

In the meantime, economists are sharply downgrading the outlook for China's economy, the world's second-biggest. Tommy Wu and Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics have slashed their forecast for Chinese economic growth this year from 6% to 5.4%. They expect most of the damage to be inflicted in the first three months of 2020.

"But a more serious and long-lasting impact cannot be ruled

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BLM, U.S. Forest Service announce fees

EO Media Group staff

WASHINGTON — The federal grazing fee for 2020 will be $1.35 per animal unit month for public lands under Bureau of Land Management control and $1.35 per head month for lands the U.S. Forest Service controls. The 2019 public land grazing fee was $1.35.

An AUM or HM — treated as equivalent measures for fee purposes — is the use of public lands by one cow and her calf, one horse or five sheep or goats for a month. A congressional formula determined the newly calculated grazing fee, which takes effect March 1. The fee will apply to nearly 18,000 grazing permits and leases the BLM administers and nearly 6,250 permits administered by the Forest Service.

Congress established the formula for calculating the grazing fee in the 1978 Public Rangelands Improvement Act. The formula has remained in use under a 1986 presidential executive order that prohibits the grazing fee from falling below $1.35 per AUM/HM, and any increase or decrease cannot exceed 25% of the previous year's level.

The annual grazing fee is established using a 1966 base value of $1.23 per AUM/HM for livestock grazing on public lands in Western states. Three factors — private grazing land lease rates, beef cattle prices and the cost of livestock production — figure into the calculation. In effect, the fee rises, falls or stays the same based on market conditions.

The BLM and Forest Service work closely with permittees to ensure public rangelands remain healthy, productive working landscapes. To better serve the American public, the BLM has initiated development of an Environmental Impact Statement to consider proposed revisions to its grazing regulations, with the goal of updating, modernizing and streamlining existing grazing regulations and providing greater flexibility for land and resource management. This effort will not affect the 2020 grazing fees.

Half of the grazing fees deposited into the U.S. Treasury are returned to the Range Betterment Fund for on-the-ground range improvement projects. Portions of collected fees are also returned to the states for use in the counties where the fees were generated.

The grazing fee applies in 16 Western states on public lands administered by the BLM and the Forest Service. The states are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Permit holders and lessees may contact their local BLM or Forest Service office for additional information.