

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Oregon unemployment remains low

SALEM — The percentage of unemployed Oregonians continues to be the lowest it has been since 1976, according to the Oregon Employment Department. The state is at 3.3% unemployment as of January 2020, .3% lower than the national average of 3.6%.

The state's unemployment rate has been declining since January 2019, which reported 4.2% of Oregonians were unemployed. The state continued its decline in the number of people not working throughout the year, ending the decade at 3.4%.

Union County's unemployment rate is above the state average at 5.1% for 2019, according to the employment department data. The year ended with approximately 11,363 employees working and 605 people reported unemployment in the county.

There are approximately 10,510 nonfarm jobs in Union County as of December 2019. The most popular jobs in Union County that are non-farm work are trade, transportation and utilities jobs (2,180) and government positions (2,460).

Wallowa County's annual employment rate ended at 6.1%. That means approximately 206 people in Wallowa reported they were unemployed. The state reported 3,135 were employed during 2019.

Wallowa County has similar trends in employment with trade, transportations and utilities jobs (470) and government jobs (630) the at the highest number of employment in December 2019.

Across Oregon, job openings are increasing in health care and social assistance and government positions, according to employment department, which also reported professional and business services, construction and manufacturing opportunities are decreasing statewide.

The state employment department will issues a further look at county specific unemployment rates March 10.

Genuine Wallowa County celebrates first anniversary

ENTERPRISE — Genuine Wallowa County, an online gift shop showcasing handmade items from Wallowa County and Nez Perce artisans, will celebrate its first anniversary March 18. The business, operated by resident Kristy Athens, has created an economic engine to complement Wallowa County's existing retail businesses.

"I wanted to help local makers without directly competing with all the great shops," Athens said in a press release. "My e-commerce site generates additional income for local artists and micro-manufacturers by selling to customers who might not be able to come to Wallowa County, and it is available year-round, 24/7."

According to the release, since opening, Genuine Wallowa County has paid local makers more than \$11,000. GWC has 60 vendors and offers more than 160 items. There is a monthly subscription box, curated gift boxes and completely self-designed boxes. GWC also builds custom gift bags for occasions such as weddings and business thank-yous.

The e-business has shipped boxes as far away as New Jersey and Georgia, and Athens sees a strong future for GWC.

"Online sales will continue to play a major role in retail," she said. "This online store gives people a chance to compete on the national market. There is great growth potential."

To celebrate the one-year anniversary and thank the community for its support, Athens is offering a 10% discount for locals ordering off the website. To receive the discount, enter the code "LOCAL" and add your zip code. Learn more at genuinewallowacounty.com.



Photo by Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

A head box and pipelines divert irrigation water from Farmers Ditch east of Joseph to the new North Prairie Creek Pipeline about a half mile from the Imnaha Highway. Farmers Ditch comes off of Wallowa Lake. Jesse Miller, who spearheaded the \$4 million-plus pipeline project, said it should be ready for use by May 1.

Upper Wallowa Valley irrigation system NEARS COMPLETION

By Bill Bradshaw
EO Media Group

JOSEPH — A \$4 million-plus irrigation pipeline is nearly complete that will give irrigators in the Upper Wallowa Valley a more efficient and less expensive way to water crops, livestock and pasture when the tap opens May 1.

The pipeline will replace long-time irrigation ditches that can lose 25% of the water through seepage into the ground, according to Bud Brashler, whose Lightning B Ranch will benefit from the pipeline.

Jesse Miller, who has farmed 1,150 acres in the area for the past 20 years, spearheaded the privately owned project with the help of several government agencies and, of course, all the landowners involved.

The North Prairie Creek Pipeline serves the northern end of the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District with Wallowa Lake water diverted from Farmers Ditch and into twin 27-inch pipelines that 17 landowners can access at various points. The pipeline will water about 2,050 acres of hay, small grains and pastureland.

"It operates under 100% gravity pressure," Miller said. "It's taking close to 600 hp of electrical pumping energy off the grid. This is definitely a 'green' project."

Miller, who masterminded the project, said the project took 10 years to complete. He got advice and financing from the irrigation district, the National Resources Conservation Service, the Oregon Water Enhancement



Photo by Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

Jesse Miller points Feb. 27 to where two 27-inch irrigation pipes of the new North Prairie Creek Pipeline will route water to landowners' property along Repplinger Road east of Enterprise.

Board, the Oregon Energy Trust and the landowners who will benefit.

While the pipeline will have flow meters, he emphasized, they won't be to restrict usage, just to monitor it so everyone gets their share of water. He said users will be limited to their share so their neighbors aren't shorted.

"It's amazing how much water we won't have to use," given the end of leakage from irrigation

ditches, Miller said.

Water from Wallowa Lake enters the pipeline via a head box on Farmers Ditch east of Joseph about a half mile from the Imnaha Highway. From there, pipelines travel underground — surfacing occasionally — to the North Prairie Creek area east of Enterprise.

Miller said the usual Wallowa County sense of community was strongly in play for the project. The pipeline had to cross the

property of some landowners who wouldn't be hooking up to it.

"It took a lot of landowner cooperation to let us go through even though they're not benefiting from it," he said. "If just one person had said 'no,' this pipeline wouldn't have happened."

He also spoke highly of the quality of work done by Henderson Logging, of Wallowa, which

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Tax Services

907826-B

2106 Cove Ave.
La Grande

541.963.4969

prosper@eoni.com

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