



Howton to play at EOU

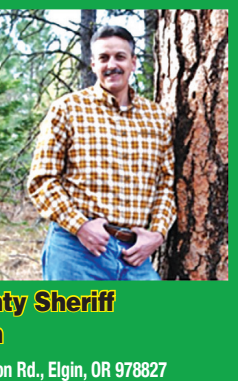
BILL MILLER

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FOR SHERIFF

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Paid for by Committee to elect Bill Miller, Sheriff. Jared Rogers - Treasurer, 73001 Palmer Junction Rd., Elgin, OR 97827



Local food shortage unlikely



Matt Griffith of Grocery Outlet examines several pallets of items the Island City store received Tuesday.

Staff photo by Dick Mason

Grocers strive to meet demands during outbreak

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The deadly coronavirus continues to gain momentum in the United States, posing an increasing threat to the economy. Still, a number of local grocers believe there are good reasons to doubt a food shortage of any magnitude is on the horizon for the Grande Ronde Valley.

Mike Colkitt, the owner of

Union Market in Union, said Tuesday his distributor, Associated Food Stores of Salt Lake City, is telling him warehouses are full. Colkitt, however, is having a difficult time keeping his shelves filled because the distributor cannot get food and other items to him fast enough to meet the growing demand of anxious customers.

“It is a logistical issue,” Colkitt said. “(The distributors) have plenty of product.”

Logistics holding up products

Randy Willson, co-owner of

Grocery Outlet in Island City with his wife, Michelle, agrees. He said the truck shipments are taking longer to reach Union County because of a continuing shortage of truck drivers in the United States and restrictions the government imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

One of these is a rule that workers in warehouses cannot work closer than 6 feet together. Randy Willson said this is reducing the number of employees distribution companies can have working in their warehouses at one time, reducing efficiency.

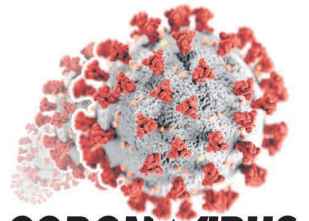
Willson said despite some-

times slower deliveries, he has been able to keep his store’s shelves filled with food items during a time when demand is skyrocketing. He noted sales on Monday were up 200% from the same Monday in March a year ago.

Marco Rennie, owner of Market Place Fresh Foods in La Grande, is guarded in his outlook. Rennie said his produce supplier is continuing to make consistent deliveries, but his primary supplier of dairy products and frozen foods is not doing as well. Deliveries are inconsistent

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Outbreak Updates



CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Observer staff

These are the latest local significant developments of the coronavirus outbreak. Look for fuller coverage of these and other COVID-19 stories at our website, www.lagrandeobserver.com, and in subsequent issues of The Observer.

•The La Grande Ranger District office is operating under a 100% telework policy because of possible exposures last week to an individual with flu-like symptoms. The U.S. Forest Service announced the exposure on social media and stated “this a precautionary measure while we wait for test results.”

The Forest Service has temporarily closed the La Grande office at 3502 Highway 30 while district staff work remotely. customer service is available by phone (541-786-0489) or e-mail (SM.FS.wwnf-web-mail@usda.gov).

•Eastern Oregon University announced it is moving all of its classes online for spring term.

“We are taking these actions for the spring term out of concern for the health of our students, faculty and staff,” EOU President Tom Insko said in a news release. “Fortunately, EOU is experienced in delivering excellence in education through

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Living in a time of COVID-19: Housing, banking and other impacts

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — With businesses closing and cutting hours due to the novel coronavirus, there is some uncertainty in the ability for people to pay their bills, including rent and mortgage payments, utilities and debt payments. Some local businesses are making moves to help alleviate some fears.

Housing

Local property managers at John Howard and Associates and Century 21 are working to help those who may not be able to afford rent due to a cutback in hours or a change in their financial situation due to the mandates around COVID-19. John Howard and Associates property manager Ashley O’Toole said the key

to getting through this is to have good communication about the problem.

“Right now we would rather hear a renter may be late in paying rent rather than having to hunt them down after the fact,” O’Toole said. “As a property owner it is not my decision to evict people or change late fees. J. H. and Associates is not going to

have an across the board policy.”

Similarly, Century 21 property manager Rosa Goodman said the company will take this on a case-by-case basis and work with the owners to ensure proper communication. Goodman said there are owners willing to waive rental payments for the time being if tenants can prove

COVID-19 closures affect them.

People receiving federal housing assistance also are looking for some certainty. U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) and other Democrat lawmakers wrote to the department of Housing and Urban Development asking for a moratorium on evictions. The department has yet to make a decision.

Utilities

Covering the power or internet bill is another concern. The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative announced it will suspend shutoffs in the case of those who cannot pay their bill.

Like the cooperative, Charter Internet Services and Eastern Oregon Net

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Observer staffers settling into new office

■Newspaper office in new home after 35 years on Fifth Street

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Staff at The Observer is adjusting to life in a new home with the newspaper in its third week at 911 Jefferson Ave. after moving at the end of February.

“The move marked the

end of a 3-1/2 decade stay at 1406 5th St., the location The Observer called home since January 1985.

“It was bittersweet,” said Karrine Brogoitti, publisher of both The Observer and related paper the Baker City Herald. “The last day I was in the office after we had moved everything out and had the community yard sale, that was really hard.”

Brogoitti said the move wasn’t difficult because of the building itself, but more because of the amount of

time employees spent there and the togetherness they formed within the walls. The publisher, who has worked for The Observer since 1997, likened it to “your first home.”

“I’ve spent more time in that building than anywhere else in my life,” she said.

She also pointed to “really fun, exciting times and proud moments” that have happened there for employees over the years.

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Staff photo by Ronald Bond

The interior of The Observer’s old location shows signs of work Tuesday to gut the building. Contractor Derek Howard is turning the former newspaper office into an apartment complex.