



Potato Drive a win-win scenario

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Giving business a boost

■ LG awards \$128,620 in loans to 16 local businesses to assist with COVID-19 losses

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Sixteen local businesses hurt by COVID-19 restrictions are receiving a timely financial boost from the city of La Grande.

The city is providing the businesses with a total of \$128,620 in loans to help them recover from economic losses due to the COVID-19 crisis. La Grande City Manager Robert Strope said all of the businesses should have received funding by Monday.

“The people receiving the money feel very grateful that the city can help them. (The loan funding) is making a difference,” Strope said.

Five businesses are professional services firms and 11 are in the retail and hospitality industry.

The businesses, all within the La Grande city limits, are among 18 that submitted completed applications for the loans. The loan committee continues to study two applications. Strope, Christine Jarski, the city economic development director, and Lisa Dawson, executive director of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, serve on the committee.

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Staff photo by Dick Mason

The Landing Hotel in La Grande is one of 16 businesses in town that received a loan from the city to keep going amid the COVID-19 crisis. Owner Karin Tsiatsos said the loan “will fill in many gaps” due to the loss of revenue, including insurance expenses and employee wages.

CITY OF LA GRANDE SMALL BUSINESS LOANS

16 businesses in La Grande have received loans up to \$10,000 from the city’s new program to provide financial help during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Le Bebe Cakes — \$5,780• The Landing Hotel — \$10,000• Mountain Works Bicycles — \$10,000• Joe & Sugar’s Café — \$10,000• Jefferson Street Depot — \$7,840• La Grande Quilt Shop — \$10,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thai Fresh Gardens — \$10,000• Laurence’s Auto Body — \$5,000• Audiology & Hearing Aid Associates — \$10,000• Becky’s Burger Wagon — \$8,000• Elisha Mayes DDS PC — \$10,000• Joseph Martinez — \$7,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buggy Bath Car Wash — \$5,000• Hauner, LLC dba The Cell Fix — \$5,000• Yia Yia Nikki’s — \$10,000• Bugs & Butterflies — \$5,000 |
| Total: \$128,620 | | |

Imbler schools budget clouded by COVID-19

By Dick Mason
The Observer

IMBLER — The Imbler School District’s budget committee received a look at a best-case scenario for 2020-21 Tuesday night but was warned the need for possible spending cuts likely looms due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The budget committee was presented with a proposed total budget of \$9.57 million for 2020-21, down \$432,000 from the present year’s spending plan because this year’s budget includes money for the bus barn and food service storage building projects, which the district completed this school year. The proposed 2020-21 budget would

allow the school district to retain all of its staff and make no program reductions, said Imbler School District Deputy Clerk Teresa Dewey.

The sobering news is the budget was built on the basis of the Feb. 25 Oregon Economic Forecast, the one most recently released. This forecast was made before COVID-19 crippled the nation’s economy because of shelter-in-place directives aimed at stopping its spread.

In Oregon, “stay home, save lives” executive orders have hit funding for state-funded services hard by putting thousands of people out of work. This will have a major impact on the money the

state has to fund public programs like education because income tax is a major source of its revenue.

This places a portion of the \$9 billion the Legislature approved for the funding of public education for the 2019-21 biennium in jeopardy.

“There is significant uncertainty about the financial outlook for the 2020-21 school year. The COVID-19 global pandemic has drastically changed the outlook in Oregon from just a few months ago,” Imbler School District Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell said in her budget message.

Each reduction of \$100 million would cost the Imbler School District about 5% of its budget,

and plans are being made by the school district for such possible revenue cuts. Lakey-Campbell said the Imbler School District could absorb a 5% cut without making any staff or program reductions. She said, though, that program reductions would be needed if there is a 10% reduction.

An element in Imbler’s favor is its strong contingency fund of about \$1 million, which could be used to buffer the impact of revenue reductions, the superintendent said.

Lakey-Campbell said the school district will have a much clearer idea of what its budget will be when the state’s May 20 economic forecast is released.

COVID-19 by the numbers*

Worldwide cases: 3,595,662
Worldwide deaths: 247,652
U.S. cases: 1,193,813
U.S. deaths: 70,802
Oregon cases: 2,916
Oregon deaths: 115
Union County cases: 4
Union County deaths: 0
Wallowa County cases: 1
Wallowa County deaths: 0

**As of 2 p.m. Wednesday, May 6. Sources: World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Oregon Health Authority*

Voters to decide on vector levy

By Dick Mason
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Local voters have more than sheriff, county commissioner, legislative and congressional races on their minds as they weigh in on the May 19 election. They also are determining the fate of a measure that could improve how effectively Union County can prevent an outbreak of West Nile Virus and other mosquito-borne diseases.

A four-year local option operating levy, Measure 31-100, would raise close to \$1.3 million for the Union County Vector Control District over the next four years. Funds from the levy would go toward mosquito control services.

The measure would cost Union County property owners 16 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value, according to a statement on ballots for the May 19 primary election. This means the owner of a \$100,000 home would pay \$16 a year for the levy.

Passage of Measure 31-100 would renew an operating levy that has been in place since 2008. A four-year operating levy of the same rate was first approved by voters in May of 2008 and was renewed by voters in 2012 and 2016, according to the Union County election ballot.

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Baker County has first confirmed case of coronavirus

EO Media Group

BAKER CITY — Baker County has its first confirmed case of coronavirus, Commissioner Mark Bennett announced Wednesday during a board of commissioners meeting.

The individual has been directed to isolate from others for the duration of their illness, which is until they are symptom-free for 72 hours, according to the Baker County Health Department.

The health department is performing contact tracing to identify and isolate anyone who may have come in close contact with this individual in the last 14 days. Nursing supervisor Alicia Hills will be leading the investigation effort with public health staff and the support of the Oregon Health Authority.

If you have been identified as a close contact with this individual you will be contacted as part of the

investigation. Support the contact tracing work by having voicemail available in the event you cannot answer. If you have had changes in your address or phone number, update the information with all your medical providers including your doctors, dentists, the health department or anywhere else you receive care.

Health privacy laws prohibit releasing identifying information about

the individual who has tested positive or their contacts.

Bennett said he is “frustrated” he hasn’t been given any other information, including general information such as when and where the person was tested.

“This is a really frustrating thing,” Bennett said Wednesday morning. “It’s hard for us to be responsive if we can’t know any of it.”

Bennett said he and Bill Harvey and Bruce Nichols, fellow commissioners, know they will field questions from residents.

Bennett emphasized, though, that having a confirmed case — which officials have been expecting and which Dr. Eric Lamb, the county’s public health officer, said was inevitable — doesn’t change the situation in the county,

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight 33 LOW Clear and chilly		Friday 73/37 Sunny; pleasant
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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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