

La Grande RV makers resuming production

EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Northwood Investments, parent company to La Grande-based recreational vehicle manufacturers Northwood Manufacturing and Outdoors RV announced Tuesday the plants will resume production Monday.

Northwood and Outdoors have a three-phase plan for the reopening, according to the press release from Northwood Investments.

Phase One included a series of steps and precautions to give employees the safest work environment possible,

including using a touchless, thermal thermometer to take each employee's temperature; a daily employee safety survey; and using face masks, disposable gloves, disinfectant and hand sanitizer.

Company CEO Craig Orton in the press release stated the health and safety of employees remains the No. 1 priority.

"We want to be sure to protect all our team members while they are at work as well as our community as a whole," he said.

With the safety measures now in place, Northwood and

Outdoors began Phase Two on Tuesday, with production managers contacting employees via phone and text to recall the first wave of workers to restart the manufacturing lines.

"Given everything we have all been through the past few weeks and months, it just feels great to simply say, 'We're back,'" Orton said.

Phase Three is the return of the balance of the work force, the company reported, which it expects to occur within the next few weeks. Northwood Investments CFO Cerise Smallwood said the intention is

to get employees back to work as soon possible.

"We are a family here," she stated in the press release, "and we truly miss every single person."

To assist in keeping clear lines of communication, the two manufactures are asking every employee to call their respective plant office this week between 8 a.m. and noon and ask to speak to the production staff about work schedules. Northwood Manufacturing and Outdoors RV will provide more scheduling information as it becomes available.



Contributed photo

Zoey Leith, a junior at Joseph Charter School, won awards for Top Producer and Most Likely to Be an Entrepreneur for her efforts in the Mentor Match Youth Entrepreneur Program. The program ended May 6 with a Zoom meeting.

Joseph Charter School junior wins at entrepreneur program

Two juniors at Enterprise High School share the 'Most Valuable Entrepreneur' award

By Bill Bradshaw

EO Media Group

JOSEPH — Zoey Leith, a junior at Joseph Charter School, won awards for Top Producer and Most Likely to Be an Entrepreneur as the ninth year of the Mentor Match Youth Entrepreneur Program wrapped up May 6.

Leith won for her business Forget-Me-Not Designs, a hand-crafted home décor business, according to a press release.

The awards and presentations were held via a Zoom meeting in light of the COVID-19 restrictions.

"Zoey was first to launch her business by signing up for two holiday bazaars," said Stacy Green, program adviser. "She was the first to develop a flyer and a social media presence. Zoey had over 50 individual transactions, a program record."

In addition, Leith partnered with Mentor Match President Foster Hobbs on a custom commission for the Wallowa County Courthouse after Commissioner Susan Roberts saw a display of their products at the Chamber of Commerce's Annual Citizen Awards Banquet. Hobbs, a senior at Enterprise High School, started Lostine River Forge and makes custom ironworks. Working with Leith, they designed a coat rack that is now on the third floor of the historic building.

"Zoey's creativity far exceeded anything we thought we wanted," Roberts said.

The commission for the youths led to an order for 18 door and drawer pulls that Hobbs made.

"They are really unique and quite beautiful," said Roberts, adding the teens did great work and were a pleasure to work with.

Most Valuable Entrepreneur, based on

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Bealls' owner files for bankruptcy protection

Houston-based Stage Stores Inc. plans to liquidate inventory at 700 stores nationwide

By Phil Wright

EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — The parent company of Bealls and other department stores filed Sunday for bankruptcy protection, unable to climb out of a financial hole the COVID-19 pandemic made even deeper.

Houston-based Stage Stores Inc. in a press release also announced it will simultaneously seek buyers for all or parts of its business and "initiate an orderly wind-down of operations."

The company operates Bealls, Goody's and Palais Royal, primarily in rural communities, and off-price stores under the Gordmans brand, and employs approximately 14,700 people at roughly 700 stores across 42 states, according to the court documents it filed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Houston, its base of operations.

The company has a few stores in Oregon, including in La Grande and Hermiston. The La Grande store opened in 2009. Stage Stores closed its properties due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs on the inside of the windows at the La Grande Bealls explain the store remains closed until the state lifts the restrictions to curb the spread of the virus.

Stage Stores in its press release stated it is taking a phased approach to reopening its stores in the coming weeks to liquidate inventory.

The company anticipates reopening 557 stores May 15, another 67 stores on May 28 and the "balance of the chain" on June 4. Stage Stores also will end the wind-down at certain locations if it receives a viable going-concern bid.

The company's Chapter 11 filing listed total assets as of Nov. 2, 2019 at more than \$1.7 billion and total liabilities at a



The Bealls in La Grande remains closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Stage Stores Inc., the parent company of Bealls and other department stores, filed Sunday for bankruptcy protection.



Photo by Phil Wright/EO Media Group

Signs in the window of the Bealls in La Grande explain the store remains closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Stage Stores Inc., the parent company of Bealls and other department stores, announced it will reopen all of its stores over the coming weeks to sell off inventory while under Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

little more than \$1 billion. The company owes more than \$3.6 million to Nike Inc., its top creditor, and almost \$487,000 to its 50th-ranked creditor, the footwear company Caleres Inc.

of Missouri.

Michael Glazer, Stage Stores president and CEO, in the press release stated the company has no more avenues to pursue save for seeking

Chapter 11 protection.

"Over the last several months, we had been taking significant steps to attempt to strengthen our financial position and find an independent path forward," according to the statement. "However, the increasingly challenging market environment was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required us to temporarily close all of our stores and furlough the vast majority of our associates. Given these conditions, we have been unable to obtain necessary financing and have no choice but to take these actions."

The company also filed a slew of motions seeking court orders to continue to operate, including the ability to pay employee wages, salaries and health benefits. Stage Stores in its press release also reported it "expects to honor existing customer programs, including gift cards and returns, for the first 30 days after a store reopens."

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

EO Media Group

Almost 60 Union County businesses receive loans

LA GRANDE — Almost five dozen Union County businesses received Paycheck Protection Loans through Umpqua Bank.

The bank recently reported about 45 of the forgivable federal loans, which are part of the stimulus package known as the CARES Act, went to businesses in La Grande and allowed more than 750 people to return to their jobs or keep working.

La Grande businesses received \$5.2 million in PPP loans, and about \$300,000 more when to other businesses in the county, according to the bank's press release. Statewide, Umpqua helped businesses secure \$750 million in loans so they could continue paying employees during the COVID-19 crisis.

According to the federal Small Business Administration, which administers the loans, the latest round of PPP provided more than \$3.2 billion to 35,751 businesses

in Oregon. Through May 1, the program provided more than \$6.8 billion in loans to 49,853 Oregon businesses.

Joseph Branch Railriders under new ownership

JOSEPH — Joseph Branch Railriders has new owners.

Robert and Tia Nichols of Joseph announced last week they purchased Joseph Branch Railriders from founders Kim and Anita Metlen of Imbler.

Robert Nichols began his rail-riding career as a guide in August 2016, served as the branch manager from 2017-19 and purchased Joseph Branch Railriders in January. Joseph Branch Railriders will continue to offer two, four and six-hour round trip pedaling adventures on the Wallowa Union Railroad.

According to the press release from the Nichols, the Metlens started a national trend when they opened the Joseph Branch Railriders in 2014. The Metlens will

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Clinic construction underway in Joseph



Photo by Ellen Morris Bishop/EO Media Group

Hospital personnel, Joseph's mayor and manager, and construction supervisors break ground for the new, aptly named Mountain View Medical Clinic building in Joseph. Left to right: Shawn Towne, Larry Braden, Gary Gray, Teresa Sajonia, Dr. Kirsten Caine, Jenny Word, Larry Davy and Nick Lunde engaged in the ceremonial shovel work last week. The excavator swung into action this week.