

New vet office opens for dogs and cats

By Dick Mason
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — A man who has opened his heart to pets and their owners for more than 42 years has opened a new veterinarian clinic in La Grande.

Grande Ronde Animal Hospital began operating Tuesday on East Adams Avenue. Lee Darch built and owns the clinic. Darch recently moved to La Grande from North Carolina where he practiced veterinarian medicine for 42 years. Darch will run Grande Ronde Animal Hospital with his daughter Emily, also a veterinarian.

Emily Darch has worked as a veterinarian in Union County for three years. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia's school of veterinary medicine.

"She is smart and very talented," Lee Darch said.

Darch, who practiced veteri-

nary medicine with his daughter earlier in North Carolina, said the chance to work with her again in La Grande is "a dream come true" and the reason he moved to Northeast Oregon. He said he is inspired to work as a veterinarian because he wants to care for those who can't care for themselves.

"How is a dog going to fix his own broken leg?" Darch said.

Grande Ronde Animal Hospital has a staff of six, including two veterinarians, but Darch expects the number to grow over time. He said the last clinic he had, in Kittrell, North Carolina, had a staff of 25. He said that throughout his career, he has had college and high school students working at his clinics to give them the taste of what the world of veterinarian medicine is like.

"I want them to be sure that this (working as veterinarians) is what they want to do," Darch said.

He said that to be a good veterinarian one has to be smart, a problem solver and one who has compassion for people and pets.

Lee Darch said he developed an interest in animals while growing up on a dairy farm in North Carolina. He said his daughter Emily has a similar background, growing up on his cattle ranch and spending many hours in the veterinary clinics where he worked.

Darch built Grande Ronde Animal Hospital, which cost at least \$600,000 with the help of a \$75,000 grant from the La Grande Urban Renewal Agency.

"It was definitely a big help," he said.

Grande Ronde Animal Hospital, 2400 Adams Ave., which is for small animals, is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to noon and 1:30-5:30 p.m. For additional information call 541-605-0833.



Photo by Dick Mason/EO Media Group

Veterinarian Lee Darch and his daughter Emily Darch, also a veterinarian, examine Benson, a border collie pup, Tuesday afternoon at the newly opened Grande Ronde Animal Hospital, La Grande.

RELOCATION IN THE WORKS

■ Architectural design business moving to space next door on Adams Avenue, La Grande

By Ronald Bond
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Associated Design & Engineering Services has outgrown its office and is moving.

The La Grande-based business, though, won't be too far from where customers know it to be. The architectural design company is moving next door from its 1015 Adams Ave. home to the former Growing Wise location at 1019 Adams.

The move is for a simple reason, according to Ralph Edwards, a co-owner and business partner in the limited-liability company with Les Tipton — a need for more space. Since forming and opening in 2018, Associated Design has added two full-time draft persons and a part-time draft person and also has a part-time engineering intern. Both part-timers are working from home, and Edwards said there isn't room to have them in the building. That's on top of two other businesses operating from the same location.

"(We'd) have no space if they came to the office," Edwards said. "Consequently, we basically need four really good work stations, besides the fact that I still run my own business, Workable Design, out of this office, and my wife (Cindy) runs her business, I.D.E.A., which takes care of web-sites and graphic design, out of



Photo by Ronald Bond/EO Media Group

Eric Lonsbury, a drafter at Associated Design & Engineering Services, La Grande, points to photos of a home the company designed a re-model plan for. The limited liability company, which has been at 1015 Adams Ave. since 2018, is moving in July into a larger space at 1019 Adams Ave.

this office too."

The location next door is much larger, and having that space will increase expansion opportunities.

"Way more room than we really need, but man, there's a lot more room to grow over there," Edwards said. "And we could get a nice conference table in there, that kind of thing. We're still plugging along, we just need a little more elbow room."

The current building provides little space to meet with clients.

"We had a meeting in here the

other day," he said. "We have this little table and we had seven guys in here from the Liberty Theatre Foundation. We're trying to put this program together for them. And there was just no room for anybody."

Edwards and Tipton both have their own businesses — Edwards runs Workable Design based in Cove and Tipton owns Blue Eagle Engineering in Summerville.

"We just looked at each other and said, 'Over 60, overworked, what are we going to do? I think



Photo by Ronald Bond/EO Media Group

Associated Design & Engineering is moving down the block to a new home at 1019 Adams Ave., La Grande, and hopes to be in the larger space by the beginning of July.

we need to open an office and populate it with some people to help take care of some of this excess work we got," Edwards said. "So that's how this all started."

The company takes the design concepts of clients and works with them to get the idea off the ground and, ultimately, a plan that can garner a building permit from city or county officials.

"Just like it says on the wall — 'Plans to Permits' — that's what we're here for, to get you a building permit, to get the project

you want to do going by taking care of everything it takes with the people across the street (at city hall)," Edwards said.

Unlike many in the areas, the business was not severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, Edwards said. It lost a couple clients who were unable to continue projects, but aside from that Associated Design has continued to move ahead.

Edwards said the hope is to be in the new location by the beginning of July.

A second chance: More farms seek bankruptcy protection

■ Report shows farms seeking bankruptcy protection increase five consecutive years

By Matthew Weather
Capital Press

MABTON, Wash. — The Mensonides family designed its dairy with "cow flow" in mind.

Cows enter the milking barn in one direction and exit a different way.

Free stalls are 3 feet longer, giving the cows easier access to feed and exercise.

"Easier cow flow is less stress for the cow, and less stress for the cow equals more milk for the dairy farmer," said Kristyn Mensonides.

But at this dairy, it's the farmers who are under stress.

The Mensonides family is among a growing number of family farmers who have sought protection under federal bankruptcy laws as the agricultural economy falters. In general, the laws allow them to prevent lenders and others from foreclosing on land or equipment while they

develop a plan to repay their debts. In many cases, farms emerge on stable financial footing, experts say.

Art and Theresa Mensonides own the Mabton, Washington, dairy. Their daughter, Kristyn, manages accounts, and another daughter, Amy, works in the office. Three other daughters are not affiliated with the dairy.

The Mensonides family has 11,500 cows and milks about 5,200 of them. They raise corn, triticale and hay for feed on 650 acres. They employ 70 people.

The dairy filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in June 2018. The Mensonides family cited the years-long drop in milk prices and a loan for 70,000 tons of corn silage that wound up being unusable as feed. Their bankruptcy plan, under which they reorganized their finances, was approved in August 2019.

Bankruptcy protection doesn't mean the end. The



Photo by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Kristyn Mensonides, left, with her parents, Thersa and Art Mensonides, at the family's dairy in Mabton, Washington. The dairy reorganized its finances under Chapter 11 of the bankruptcy law.

dairy continues to operate.

"We're still working hard, day and night, 24-seven, 365 days a year," Theresa said.

Their repayment plan was originally going to last 15 years, but it could be extended because of the effects of COVID-19 on the industry. This spring demand from restaur-

rants for milk has evaporated, causing prices in some areas to drop into single digits per hundred-weight, far below the cost of production.

Under the plan, the Mensonides family must meet certain criteria each month.

It's the first time the family has filed for bankruptcy protection.

"We've had tough times, but we always could work it out," Art said.

It's not an easy situation for the family.

They get frustrated by delays in the process. Conversations with the bank are now done entirely through attorneys, which adds to the cost.

But they stick together.

"Keep hoping, keep praying, and keep your faith," Theresa said. "Lord willing, we'll get out. He has a plan for us."

"I stick to the cows," Art said. "You have to. I cannot stick my head in the ground. There's always a way, and there's always a hope."

That hope, however, varies from moment to moment, Kristyn said.

"When you have a good day, it erases all the bad days, and then you have a bad day, and it just erases all the good days," she said.

'Heartbreaking, alarming'

A survey of court documents by the Capital Press found during the first quarter of 2020, 170 U.S. family farms filed for Chapter 12 bankruptcy protection, a part of the law designed specifically for family farmers.

That's up from 130 for the same period in 2019.

Across the country, 595 family farmers sought

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