

Keeping the place spiffy pays dividends for business owners

Curbside appeal does not just apply to houses. It's the first impression customers have of your business, and especially during this tough economic time, anything a business owner can do to attract and keep customers is more important than ever.

The first step in making sure your business is inviting is to step outside and using your critical eye, scan the entire area. Often a business owner or manager uses a side or back entrance and neglects to pay attention to the front of the store.

Do you have cracks in your sidewalk with grass growing up in between? If you don't want to use chemicals, give your local extension agent or nursery a call and find out what natural options there are.

Is your sidewalk swept and regularly hosed off? Check to see if your entry is free of cobwebs and that your front door and knob are clean—maybe even consider repainting your door an eye-catching color.

Look at your signs. Are



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they faded or worn? Can they can be easily seen while driving or walking by?

Check to see if there are too many flyers in your window and whether they are outdated. Having a designated spot inside will give organizations a place to advertise their event or other information and will leave your windows clear so customers can see what you have to offer or enjoy your display. This may lessen the chances of them reading the flyer and walking on by.

Speaking of seeing through your windows...can you...or is it time to break out the window cleaner?

Are objects in your window display covered with dust or faded by the sun? When was the last time you changed it? Shoppers are looking for what's new and different and are not going to be drawn in by the same old stuff.

Have you planted, weeded, and watered your flowers? Is your flag faded and tattered or properly lit?

Make certain your days and hours of operation are clearly posted and that you adhere to them. It doesn't make customers very happy to find a note saying, "I'll be back in ten minutes or closed for vacation."

As shoppers venture out,

feeling safe is of utmost importance to them. Post your COVID-19 policy on your front door so customers know what to expect and what your efforts are to keep them safe. Many businesses are providing hand sanitizer near the front door and requesting customers use it when entering and exiting. Some are providing masks. Be certain you are following the mandatory safety guidelines for your type of business. Clean often, paying special attention to doorknobs, the counter, and pin pads on debit card machines — doing this in front of customers so they can see you are paying attention to cleanliness is not a bad idea.

Finally, you may want to consider joining a downtown association or banding together with other business owners in coming up with a plan inviting other shops in the area to participate in keeping their store fronts spiffed up. Everyone will benefit and customers will have a reason to come in and spend their money.

***About the Author**
Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, which provides free, confidential business advising.*

INTERCROPPING

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Again, canola produces a bit more.

Tim said when harvested in early September, the peas are harvested with the mustard or canola they're growing with and then separated in their seed-cleaning facility.

He said mustard has at least three uses. The most well-known is as a condiment used on food. And, he said, "Some people just crush it for oil."

But another use helps the harvest. Mustard can be plowed back into the soil to work as a natural soil fumigant that serves as an insecticide.

Canola is popular for its oil, and the dry matter left after the oil has been extracted can be used for animal and pet feed, as well as fertilizer.

Yet it's for more than productivity the Melvilles grow such crops as mustard, canola and peas. Tim said the entire operation is no-till. That means they don't regularly plow fields prior to planting, which disrupts the soil and allows for erosion. Although he's getting near retirement, he's thinking of the future and wishes more growers had used no-till practices longer.

"If we'd started doing this 100 years ago, there wouldn't be the erosion there is today," he said.

Even so, no-till allows for weed growth so herbicides such as Roundup are necessary today.

"I'm confident they'll come up with something better," he said.

Weeds aren't the only problem farmers in the Wallowa Valley face. Kevin noted depredation of crops by deer and elk are a constant headache.

"But there's not much we can do about them," he said. "The ODFW (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) opened a new season so we can start shooting cow elk in August" through November.

Urban residents aren't that familiar with such problems, he noted.

"They just do a lot of damage on private property," he said of the elk. "We had a couple fields that were a total loss because of elk damage."

He said they received an insurance payment, but it wasn't near what the sale of the damaged crop would've been.

Tim Melville, who started the farm in 1973 with his wife, Audry, worked with his father and brother before launching his own operation. Audry, he said, is a vital member of the Cornerstone team.

"Somebody's got to keep track of the money," he said. "You've got to know your costs or you're going to go broke."

As for the markets, Kevin said he expects this year will be about average. Wheat prices, he said, are looking a little down. But mustard, canola and peas are all commodities for which they have a contracted price set ahead of time.

"We already know what we're going to get on those, which is nice," he said. "We don't have to worry what price those commodities will bring and we can budget accordingly."

He said overall, he's pleased with how all the crops are doing so far this year.

"They're doing very well because of the timely rains and cool temperatures," he said. "Generally, the crops look pretty good."



Photo by Sabrina Thompson/EO Media Group

Olivia Westenskow, owner of Snoasis, starts making each treat by shaving ice into a cup. The shaved ice shack is open this summer at Riverside Park, La Grande.

SNOASIS

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Westenskow said. "As a mom I thought it would be a great idea to give my kids that same experience."

Previously the shack was open on Adams Avenue, but Westenskow said she thought they would have more luck selling at the park.

While playing or attending an event, park

visitors see the shack as a nice treat. She said it also is great for date nights or family time.

Despite COVID-19, Westenskow said, there are plenty of customers. She said employees are talking the appropriate measures by wearing masks and gloves and frequently cleaning.

The shack is open Tuesday-Saturday from around noon to 6:30 p.m. depending on the weather and events at the park.

JOBLESS

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Leisure and hospitality had the biggest rebound statewide in June, adding 31,400 jobs. That gives it a two-month total of 47,600 according to the OED press release, but still just 39% of the more than 121,000 lost the prior two months.

Manufacturing, the hardest-hit sector in Union County during the pandemic with more than half its jobs slashed from March to May — a drop from 1,310 to 650 — saw a small uptick at the state level in June. Statewide, there were 13,900 manufacturing jobs lost from March to May in Oregon, and about 26% of those

jobs (3,700) were brought back in June. The total at the county level for June won't be released until later in the month.

Baker County, according to data on the OED website, was hardest hit in the leisure and hospitality industry — 270 of the 890 job losses shown from March to May.

One analytical group

said Oregon's recovery from the pandemic was the best in the nation during the last week in June and beginning of July. The site WalletHub marked Oregon's change in unemployment claims in the week June 29 as compared to the week of Jan. 1 — 9,771 vs. 6,714, an increase of 45.5% — was the "quickest recovery in the U.S."

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