



Phil Wright/The Observer

Cecil stays still as Debbi Larson grooms him Tuesday, March 30, 2021, at her La Grande business Best of Breed. She is no longer taking new clients because her business has been so busy during the pandemic.

Ambulance service answers the call for fires, COVID-19

By **BILL BRADSHAW**

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — An ambulance service based in Eastern Oregon that often helps with wildfire victims has turned its attention to the still-raging COVID-19 pandemic that, unlike last year's wildfires, has not yet subsided.

Owned by Chris Arvidson, of Baker City, Med Transport is a privately held ambulance service that responds to calls — in addition to Oregon — in California, Texas, Maryland and New Jersey. Arvidson said he has a pool of 45 paramedics and a handful of emergency medical technicians who can be deployed.

"We have changed the services offered by our service and have been fortunate to send out the experienced personnel to represent our community and our service throughout the country," Arvidson said in a press release.

In Eastern Oregon, paramedics reside in Enterprise, Baker City, La Grande and Pendleton, Arvidson said.

Arvidson spoke highly of his Enterprise paramedic, Sean Cariss, who has worked on fires and disaster-relief assignments with the service.

"I spent a good part of October on an ambulance with

See, **Ambulance**/Page 3B

Where's the stimulus?

Local businesses may not be feeling injection from personal stimulus money

By **PHIL WRIGHT**

The Observer

LA GRANDE — The latest round of personal stimulus money may not be making its way into local businesses.

Most people nationwide are using the latest round of stimulus payments to cover the costs of food, utilities and household supplies, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. Paying down debt and paying for housing and vehicles also are among the top ways the survey indicates people are using the funds.

Spending on household items, such as TVs and furniture, giving to charity or family and purchasing recreational goods are at the bottom of the list.

But some La Grande business owners said there is more to the stimulus spending picture.

Shaun Daggett and his father, Mike Daggett, own and run Northwest Furniture & Mattress. Shaun Daggett said their big issue is not a lack of customers looking to spend stimulus money.

"If we had inventory, I'm sure that would help us," he said.

The pandemic has led to a slowdown in production. Trying to maintain social distancing in manufacturing, he said, means furniture makers are not producing as much. The La Grande store usually has 36 sets of living room furniture, he said, but Tuesday, March 30, there were only four.

Other factors are com-

pounding the inventory shortage.

Nearly 50 ships carrying goods for stores across the United States are stuck in Southern California. A spike in coronavirus cases among dockworkers there is creating a bottleneck of goods as more ships

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— **Shaun Daggett**, co-owner Northwest Furniture and Mattress, La Grande

come in while goods are going out at a trickle. Add to this, Daggett said, the massive container ship that blocked marine traffic through the Suez Canal for nearly a week. All of that means delays in getting goods to people.

Just the other day, he said, customers came in looking to buy a sofa. But if they want something not on the floor, that means ordering and waiting seven or eight months.

"So we're waiting until October, November of this year," he said.

Still, Daggett said, business is not taking a downturn.

"We're definitely doing OK," he said, "but I think if we could get product, we would be doing phenomenal."

Maria Vazquez said she has noticed a slight increase in sales the last couple of weeks at her pizza and sandwich shop, New York Richie's. Rather than a surge, she said, it seems more like a steady climb. And while business remains slow overall,

spending more time with their pets, so grooming services have increased.

"I groom two days a week," she said, "and my service is booked through the end of the year."

She said she had to stop taking new clients. Another groomer who uses the space at the shop three days a week, Larson said, has appointments for the next seven weeks.

Whit Hartz at his business Mountain Works Bicycles doubted he has seen a surge, but then again, it could be hard to tell. Mountain Works, he said, has been "unprecedentedly busy."

The pandemic forced gym goers and exercise enthusiasts to seek out new ways to work out, and that meant going outdoors. Ski and bicycle shops, Hartz said, have stayed busy during the pandemic.

While the business has not noticed an uptick in local spending from stimulus payments, he also said spring is just starting in the Grande Ronde Valley and even more business could come with the change in weather.

As COVID-19 cases continue to trend down, Hartz and some of the other local business owners said they see some light at the end of the coronavirus tunnel and a greater return to normalcy.

"I think people are ready to be people again," Hartz said. "I hope."

sales are good.

She also said the stimulus payments are a boon to the families who needed it to keep their homes and pay for essentials, such as clothing.

Debby Larson said she cannot tell if stimulus money is making a difference for her business, Best of Breed, which provides pet supplies, food and grooming, but the pandemic sure has.

"My business has increased probably 30% since the pandemic started," she said.

She attributed the uptick to a few situations.

More people have sought pets during the pandemic. Dog ownership nationwide jumped, she said, as people bought "pandemic puppies." And people are

Pilot project vaccinates hundreds of agricultural workers

By **BRYCE DOLE**

East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — Maria Corona knew she wanted to get the vaccine. Three months earlier, eight of her family members tested positive for COVID-19. So had many of her coworkers and neighbors.

"I was really concerned," said Corona, who, at 49, spends half the year working in food processing plants and the other half working in the fields near her home in Boardman. "You hear a lot in the news that people are dying, so you get afraid."

The day after Corona learned through Facebook that she and her coworkers were eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, she hopped in her Dodge Caravan and made her way down to the SAGE Center, where state

and county health officials were offering doses to farmworkers in a four-day clinic that was the first of its kind.

"In order to not infect other people, to feel safe with your family and to be secure is what's most important," Corona said through a translator after getting her vaccine on Wednesday, March 24.

Akiko Saito, deputy director for the COVID-19 response and recovery unit, a joint division between the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Human Services, said the clinic was a "pilot project" specifically geared to immunize a community long understood to be especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

In all, officials vaccinated over

See, **Vaccines**/Page 3B



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Maria Corona receives her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during an event for farm and food processing workers at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021. State and county officials offered doses of the vaccine to farmworkers during a four-day clinic.