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INSIDE GET OUT THE BOOTS AND COWBOY HAT, ROUND-UP IS BACK



Sheriffs won't enforce mask mandate

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon sheriff's offices reaffirmed they would not enforce the mask mandates Gov. Kate Brown set in place. As well, a number of sheriffs across Eastern Oregon, including in Baker and Union counties, have addressed the matter in letters to the governor stating they will not be enforcing any mask mandates.

But the governor never asked them to do so.

The enforcement of mask mandates falls under the supervision of the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration, not local law enforcement, according to the governor's office.

"The mandates don't provide authority to me to do anything," Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said in a previous interview with the East Oregonian.

There is one exception — the sheriffs said they would continue to handle issues of trespassing wherein a patron of a business refuses to wear a mask after being asked to by the business — but that is the ultimate extent to which the law enforcement agencies have said they would intervene.

"Business and property owners have a right to set ground rules for how people behave in their businesses," said Morrow County Sheriff Kenneth Matlack. "When a person becomes disruptive because of this issue, in that situation, it's not

See, **Sheriffs/Page A5**

EVENTS AXED

Local events feel impact of COVID-19 spike

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
and DICK MASON
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — In what felt like a somewhat normal summer, many local events returned to Northeastern Oregon after being canceled in 2020. However, as Union and Wallowa counties experienced record high COVID-19 cases in August, many late-summer and early-fall events have been canceled or modified.

The current state of the pandemic has organizers unsure about future events as the delta variant surges across the country.

"We're going to lean on the cautionary side, always," said Eastern Oregon Film Festival Director Chris Jennings.

Jennings also co-owns HQ on Depot Street, which hosted a number of concerts and events throughout the summer when COVID-19 cases were low. With the recent spike, the venue announced on Aug. 11 that open mic nights and concerts would be put on hold until further notice.

"We definitely had an interest in the open mic," he said. "People were really enjoying that opportunity, and we're certainly hopeful to bring that back as soon as we can."

HQ hosted concerts on Saturdays for most of the summer, with open mic nights taking place during the week. Jennings noted that the plan was to continue hosting shows throughout the fall and winter months, but the spike in COVID-19 made things difficult from a monetary standpoint. HQ was operating on a limited capacity during the summer and there are no concerts planned for the future, but the venue is still available for musicians and others to rent out as a creative space.

"When it comes down to it, we have to get enough bodies in here to make a buck, so it's more cost effective right now to not

See, **Events/Page A5**



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Patrons at the Liberty Theatre Cafe sit outside and enjoy a meal Friday, April 23, 2021. The Liberty Theatre venue is slated to show some of the Eastern Oregon Film Festival entries, but audiences may be limited or prohibited based on COVID-19 cases in October.

"Depending on where we're at in October will dictate how many at-the-door tickets for each event we might have. It's a juggle all the way up to the end."

Chris Jennings, Eastern Oregon Film Festival director

Employers ask: Where are the workers?

Workers in short supply amid year of great job growth

Editor's Note

This is part one of a five-part series by the EO Media Group to publish over the next five weekends, looking at the issue of the lack of workers for jobs in Central and Eastern Oregon — why workers are not returning to previously held jobs and how businesses are pivoting to function without being fully staffed.

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin

BEND — With record job growth in Oregon, Whitney Keatman never imagined she would have

Worker Shortage



FIRST IN A 5-PART SERIES

problems finding workers for her Scott Street location of Sparrow Bakery.

And she didn't. It was getting them to stay that has plagued her longtime Bend business.

In the past year Keatman, a co-owner, made 117 job offers and most were accepted. But after just three months,

only about 42 workers remained. The bakery needed a minimum of 20 workers at the Scott Street location and by the end of this summer there were six.

So last week, she made a hard decision: She will close the bakery at the Old Iron Works Arts District.

"We've been struggling for seven years, with moments of success," Keatman said. "Over the years we've had on again and off again good managers. When you don't have the right management, you have a hard time retaining workers."

"It's common for people to come and begin training and then get another job offer that competes with wages," Keatman said. "There's no allegiance.

It's a competitive market for employers."

Hard time

During a year of record job growth in Oregon, employers like Keatman have had the hardest time finding workers to fill positions. Companies, particularly in the leisure and hospitality industries, across the state are scrambling to find employees.

The hospitality, hotel, restaurant and tourism-related industries added 6% more jobs this year, economists say. Hiring is more competitive than ever as employers raise wages, offer signing bonuses, referral bonuses, improved benefits, even subsidies for housing. But those incentives also have to compete

against federal unemployment benefits, an increase in household income from federal stimulus funds and retirements.

Just ask Robin Clement, co-owner of Monkless Belgian Ales in Bend. Clement and her husband opened their pub just four months before the pandemic shut it down to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Fast forward to July when tourism season in Central Oregon hits a high note and the state is reopening as COVID-19 cases wane, and the Clements are scrambling to get enough workers to keep the brew pub open six days a week.

In an interview with an out-of-town worker

See, **Workers/Page A5**

INDEX

Classified.....B2	Horoscope.....B2	Opinion.....A4
Comics.....B5	Local.....A2	Outdoors.....B1
Crossword.....B2	Lottery.....A2	Records.....A3
Dear Abby.....B6	Obituaries.....A3	State.....A8

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Sunday
	52 Low		87/51
	Clear		Mostly sunny

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com. More contact info on Page 4A.



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TUESDAY EXPERIMENT WITH PIZZA STYLES

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