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New job offers new opportunity

Timothy Bishop will be La Grande's economic development director

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande announced the hiring of a new economic development director on Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2021. Timothy Bishop, who has served as Baker County's tourism marketing director for the last 11 years, is set to take over the position Oct. 21.



Bishop

Bishop will replace former director Christine Jarski, who held the position for six years and left the role in June.

"I'm excited," Bishop said. "I have a lot of work to button up here in the next few weeks, but I'm super excited to hit the ground running and be a part of the La Grande team."



Strope

Prior to his role in Baker County, Bishop worked as a main street program manager for approximately 20 years in Walla Walla and Ellensburg. In Walla Walla, he focused his efforts on creating a thriving downtown area in the late 1990s. Bishop's background in marketing and promotions helped him transition into the tourism marketing position, where he moved to be closer to his wife's family.

"I loved my time in Baker," he said. "It's been exciting to be a part of a tourism industry that has transformed a lot in the last decade."

Now in La Grande, one of Bishop's primary points of emphasis will be helping local businesses recover from challenges presented during the pandemic. Bishop stated that his focus will be on small businesses and how tourism can play a role in stimulating local economies. He is looking forward to working with the Union County Chamber of Commerce, La Grande Main Street Downtown and Eastern Oregon University.

"When the opening came up in La Grande, I just felt like this was an opportunity for me to get back into more of that

See, **Bishop**/Page A5



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Freshman Kaydance Birkeland, a pre-veterinary student at Eastern Oregon University, competes in an obstacle course on Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021, during the university's annual Week of Welcome event.

Back in session

Eastern Oregon set to launch new school year with 100% in-person classes

By **ANDREW CUTLER**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — After spending more than a year dealing with in-person and hybrid learning schedules, officials with Eastern Oregon University are excited at the prospect of campus life resuming a more normal look in 2021-22.

Classes are set to begin on campus Monday, Sept. 27. The school started its 93rd academic year on Sept. 20 with the annual Convocation, while students began moving into residence halls on Sept. 22.

"This fall we are planning to be 100% in-person, in the classroom," said Tim Seydel, Eastern's vice president for university advancement. "Students in the classes, being taught directly in-person with faculty? You bet."

That doesn't mean Eastern isn't taking the continuing pandemic seriously.

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Incoming Eastern Oregon University freshmen line up for gear during the university's annual Week of Welcome event on Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021.

EOU offers a 'bridge' for students

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University is now offering a free class to incoming freshmen as a way to help students from abroad get acclimated to university life.

Summer Bridge, which is financed by the university, allows students to earn up to two credits over the course of less than two weeks before classes begin on campus. Students get together in a small group — the cohort in the inaugural class numbered

just 23 students — and do team-building exercises and activities. The program is something the university has wanted to get rolling for the past few years.

"The summer bridge program was created so that we could give students a kind of a kick start into the year," said Kathleen Brown, student success coordinator at EOU. "They actually can get two credits

See, **Bridge**/Page A5

Employers face a changing demographic

Editor's Note: This is the fourth in a five-part series by EO Media Group looking at 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 **BILL BRADSHAW** and **ALEX WITTMER**
EO Media Group

WALLOWA COUNTY — It's no secret that employers across the state are struggling to find workers.

Business owners collectively furrow their brow at the trickle of job applications as more and more businesses open and the share of workers seems to be vanishing into thin air.

The tightening labor market makes operation difficult, and expanding nearly impossible.

"It's pretty much across all industries," said Stacy Beckman, general manager of Wallowa

Worker Shortage



FOURTH IN A 5-PART SERIES

County Grain Growers in Enterprise. "Managers I've talked to are having difficulty trying to get help."

He said the business he runs didn't actually lose any workers to the pandemic, but expanding his workforce has been a challenge.

"Trying to add (workers) is tough," he said. "It's even tougher in a smaller community like we are."

Cindy Ellis, who owns and operates Heavenly's Restaurant in Enterprise, switched to takeout only when the pandemic first struck, but was able to resume indoor seating as businesses were allowed to reopen. But then reliable

employees became scarce.

"We had to cut our indoor seating because someone we hired didn't show," she said.

Ellis on Thursday, Sept. 16, said Heavenly's was open for indoor seating.

"We got a lot of folks from Elgin," she said, and despite a small workforce, "we were swamped."

More boomers are retiring

Eastern Oregon saw only negligible gains in population over the

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TUESDAY

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