



New tanning, skull cleaning business opening in Union

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION — Few tasks give Michelle Steevens of Union a greater feeling of joy and satisfaction than transforming animal hides into soft, pliable leather products people can use.

“It is a labor of love. I love tanning hide into leather. It is all I think about,” she said.

Steevens is understandably filled with excitement and anticipation as she begins the operation of her new business in Union, Catherine Creek Hides. The store, which opened Friday, Nov. 26, will provide hide tanning and bone cleaning services beginning in January. It is now open by appointment for people who want to see its limited selection of animal hides, furs and skulls.

Steevens said the tanning services offered by Catherine Creek Hides will help fill a void.

“There is a huge shortage of tanners in this country,” she said.

Steevens said many tanneries have been shut down for environmental reasons, such as the chemicals used in the tanning process. She said this will not be an issue for her because she focuses on using organic products.

Another reason for the shortage, Steevens said, is that tanning raw hides is taxing.

“It is very labor intensive work,” she said.

Steevens views tanning not only as work but also as



Dick Mason/The Observer

Michele Steevens, shown here on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021, at her new store, Catherine Creek Hides, moved to Union to expand her hide tanning and bone cleaning business.

an art, one whose medium is rawhide.

“It is fascinating material,” she said. “You can do anything with it.”

The process of tanning, Steevens said, has a complexity that she finds intriguing.

“There is a lot to it. I am always learning something new,” she said.

The products she produces through the tanning process include hair on hide items such as pelts and rugs.

Steevens started tanning as a hobby while living in Southern Oregon and then began operating a small business out of her garage. Soon her business became more than she could handle in her garage and she was able to leave her job and keep her expanding tannery operation going.

“I outgrew my space so quickly,” she said.

Steevens moved to Union three months ago because of the opportunity there to open Catherine Creek Hides in the former Bronson Lumber building, 219 E. Beakman St.

The bone cleaning service Catherine Creek Hides will be offering is one Steevens also provided in Southern Oregon. It will be primarily for skulls of game animals people want to keep. Such skulls are often referred to as European mounts.

Steevens will give customers a choice of two cleaning methods for bones — boiling or dermestid beetles.

The boiling method involves placing a skull or other

See, *Game*/Page B2

‘Twinkly lights’ stir up childhood nostalgia



SUZANNAH MOORE-HEMANN
CHAMBER CHAT

Twinkly lights. For something so simple, they are so enticing. Not to over-generalize, but I don’t think I have ever encountered anyone who doesn’t like them. They make rooms feel instantly more festive; they add such a romantic charm to downtown streets when spiraling around streetlamps and tree limbs.

Years ago, when assessing a new photography filter (you remember — the kind you put on a physical camera, not that thing from Instagram or wherever), I spent the afternoon at Max Square Park, simply photographing the decorative lights. Twinkly lights just feel so friendly — you want to leave them up all year because of their ambience, but don’t want to risk losing the magic.

Turns out, a quick Google search revealed twinkly lights trigger fond childhood memories that, in turn, flood the brain with

dopamine. Guess the so-called magic isn’t quite “magic” after all.

What continues to stay magical year after year is the blossoming festivities throughout the valley as the last leaves fall and the first snowflakes are spotted. Our downtown and community businesses reveal glowing, beautiful displays as we start to make our gift lists and wish lists. Even the gently piping music changes into the ever-familiar “that time of year” Wham-tastic classics as we hear more of Mariah in six weeks than we need to in a lifetime (if you don’t know me well, just know that, yes, I am doing a slight eye roll as I hit repeat on the N’SYNC holiday album).

While I will admit, I’m pretty quick to volume-down on Mariah, I eagerly await the excited buzz of holiday bazaars and activities with the same anticipation as I have since I was a child. Exploring each table and booth in wonderment of what felt like never-ending displays of holiday splendor as I impatiently struggled to see every single detail of the sights ... I can feel my heart

race a little just reminiscing. The lively chatter, the dainty scent of pine boughs and candles, the fresh baked goods — all of it is an inescapable memory of warmth.

Nowadays, my enthusiasm partly stems from catching up with longtime acquaintances whom I see less frequently. Tempting as telling Santa what I’d like still seems to be, I love hopping from shop to shop, looking for the giving trees, then conducting a scavenger hunt for what I would like to imagine is the quintessential goodie to help share the magic.

Last year, we lacked the bazaars and the interactions for which we come so dearly to look forward; hopefully, this year will shape up to be (safely) different as more and more of us slowly and cautiously start planning events and holiday gatherings. We shopped curbside and ordered takeout for months; this year, I am eager to share those forgone holiday parties at restaurants and around family tables over laughter and building future fond memories.

See, *Chamber*/Page B2



EO Media Group, File

An October report by the Oregon Employment Department found the share of workers age 55 and older has tripled across the state over the past three decades — while the total number of jobs grew only about 50%.

Oregon’s aging workforce trend expected to accelerate

By **JULES ROGERS**
Oregon Capital Insider

SALEM — An October report by the Oregon Employment Department found the share of workers age 55 and older has tripled across the state over the past three decades — while the total number of jobs grew only about 50%.

According to the report, these aging workers held slightly

more than 10% of jobs in the state in 1992, but by 2019, that number increased to 24%. The report cited that the large Baby Boomer generation, now 55 and older, are more likely to continue in the labor force at that age than previous generations.

“It’s important to consider the implications for businesses’ future ability to find enough

See, *Workforce*/Page B2