

Friend's death cloaked in secrecy and silence



DEAR ABBY ADVICE

DEAR ABBY: A dear friend of mine, "Dirk," died by suicide a couple of years ago. We were very close when we were young but saw each other only occasionally as adults. However, on the occasions we did get together, it always felt like we picked up where we left off.

I found out about my friend's death from a family member after I discovered his phone number was no longer working and his Facebook and Messenger accounts

had been deleted. He had died a few months earlier. Dirk's family asked me not to tell anyone that the death was a suicide. They didn't want his memory to be about that final decision. Because there was no obituary in the newspaper (they didn't want one), it feels as though my friend has been erased with no trace.

I'm still having a hard time with his death. I feel like I should put an in-memoriam obituary in the paper. I also feel a need to talk about it with others (both for myself and as a warning to others). My mother thinks I should abide by the wishes of the family. What do you think? — MISSING MY FRIEND IN OHIO

DEAR MISSING: When someone takes their own life, there are usually a range of emotions experienced by the survivors. These can include shame, guilt and anger. Fortunately, there are mental health programs that can help with these if the family is aware they are available. A call to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255) could guide them if they reach out. I sincerely hope you will listen to your mother and respect the wishes of the deceased's family, even though you do not agree. If you do what you are contemplating, it could cause the family even more pain.

DEAR ABBY: Our 26-year-old

married son currently lives with us. His wife of three years (close in age) was raised in a different culture and has recently started living with her parents in a city four hours away. My son has a stable, well-paying job and cannot relocate. They talk on the phone many times a day and night, and both say their marriage is "fine."

She doesn't work and doesn't finish anything she starts. She contributes to her family's household by using the car and money our son provides. She says she became depressed when she lived in our town but is happy with her parents and really doesn't see moving out. We feel she is immature, con-

trolling and taking advantage of our son. We have told him as much. He understands he has a situation but seems too weak to change it. What more can we do? — FLUSTERED PARENTS IN TEXAS

DEAR PARENTS: Your son knows your opinion. You can — and should — do nothing more than you already have. Because he and his wife say they are happy with the situation, keep your mouths shut and refrain from stirring the pot. At some point, one of them will want to make changes, which may mean your son will have to relocate. But this is his problem, and one he must resolve on his own.

DIRT

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land attractive.

Then the recession hit.

As stock prices plummeted and financial institutions teetered toward collapse, Fairbairn said, "farmland, along with other 'real assets,' took on a new luster in the eyes of investors."

The financial sector's appetite for farmland took off and hasn't slowed since. Land use experts say other factors, including concerns about climate change and dwindling water supplies, have intensified the land rush.

Tracking buyers

Uncovering who's investing isn't easy. That's because, according to Andrew Gunnoe, a professor of rural sociology at Maryville College, in the U.S., "no comprehensive database of landownership exists at the federal level."

USDA tracks purchases by foreign investors but not domestic buyers.

States, too, rarely track farmland ownership, so tax parcel data are scattered across counties.

Jim Johnson, land use and water planning coordinator at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said capturing a true picture of investment would demand data from every county in the West. Experts say no one has undertaken that mammoth project in its entirety, but individual organizations and researchers have compiled pieces.

Megan Horst, a Portland State University professor who studies food systems, is a leader in this field. Stringing together data

from Oregon's 36 counties, she recently analyzed farmland sales from 2010 to 2015 in an effort to uncover investment patterns.

"I think it's important for people to know who owns our land," she said.

Building on Horst's work, the Capital Press requested data from county assessors' offices on farmland sales from 2015 through 2021, focusing on three major regions: the Columbia Gorge, Central Oregon and the Willamette Valley.

Big picture

The datasets reveal that while the majority of farmland sales are still associated with family farming, more properties are being sold to investors and corporations.

Between 2010 and 2015, there were, on average, 1,656 sales of Oregon farmland each year.

Seventy-nine percent of these properties were sold to individuals or similar entities, accounting for 54% of the acreage.

In contrast, 12% of farms were bought by corporations, but they accounted for more than 40% of the acreage purchased. In other words, corporations bought larger properties.

Of the 1,853 corporate buyers, less than half had clear connections to agriculture and instead were involved with real estate and property development, investing, manufacturing, renewable energy and other industries.

Only 10% of the farms were purchased by out-of-state buyers, but they bought 26% of the total acreage.

Who is buying farmland is only half the story

— some would say the less important half.

"Who owns the property is not really relevant," said Greg Holmes, food systems program director and Southern Oregon advocate at 1,000 Friends of Oregon, a land use watchdog nonprofit. "What's relevant is: What are they going to do with it?"

Columbia Gorge

From 2010 to 2015, the Columbia Gorge region had the highest percentage of properties purchased by out-of-state buyers, at 14%, and one-quarter of all buyers were corporations.

The region has continued to be a popular investment location. From January 2015 to November 2021, in Hood River County, 413 farm properties representing 9,760 acres were sold.

The database, cross-referenced with business filings, reveals that top areas of investment were in tourism, real estate and high-value perennial crops.

"The biggest threat to farming in the Hood River area is mostly tourism-related," said Mike McCarthy, whose family grows pears in the area.

McCarthy is a board member of Thrive Hood River, a land use organization. He became interested in protecting farmland after, in the 1970s, a resort developer offered to convert his parents' land into a golf course.

According to an agricultural lender who spoke on condition of anonymity, there's also "huge institutional interest" in land near the Columbia River because of the valuable water rights.

In some pockets along the Gorge, growers have

banded together to hold out against corporate investment pressure, leasing properties to one another or forming partnerships.

Central Oregon

From 2015 to 2021, the number of farmland transfers in Deschutes County was 568, representing 35,196 acres.

In Central Oregon as a whole, one-quarter of investors from 2010 to 2015 were corporations that bought a whopping 59% of the total acreage sold.

Horst, of PSU, said the big trend in Central Oregon has been conversion of farmland into developments, in part because the city of Bend is a fast-growing population center.

"Things are changing rapidly in Central Oregon," said Horst.

Experts say the population upswing has put pressure on land and water supplies.

"We're seeing inch-by-inch erosion of farmland," said Nellie McAdams, executive director of the Oregon Agricultural Trust.

Deschutes County data from 2015 to 2021 show a few major themes. Top buyers included real estate and land development companies, investment firms and companies, including water utilities, buying land for the water rights.

Farther east, in Grant County, investments have taken on a different flavor.

Here, said Shaun Robertson, president of Grant County Farm Bureau, two big themes have emerged: wealthy individuals or families moving to the country for its amenities, and people or companies buying land for hunting purposes.

New business growth is soaring in Oregon

By MIKE ROGOWAY The Oregonian

SALEM — New business formation climbed sharply in Oregon as the pandemic recession eased, with entrepreneurs leaping in to start new companies this year at an unprecedented rate.

Oregonians started an average of 4,100 businesses each month over the past year, an increase of more than 25% from the same period in the 12 months before the pandemic, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. That's the fastest pace in the 17 years for which the government has Oregon numbers.

It might seem surprising that people choose to take a big risk — starting a new business — during a time of upheaval. Some Oregon businesses, especially bars and restaurants that endured intermittent shutdowns during the pandemic's first year, have now closed permanently.

But entrepreneurs recognize recessions as opportunities, too, when old business models are under stress and new ones emerge.

"Entrepreneurs have always thrived in the unknown," said Amanda Osborne, president of the Oregon Entrepreneurs Network. "These massive disruptions are just an incredible time to rethink, reinvest, to start something, to look at something with fresh eyes."

And federal pandemic aid, in the form of business grants and personal stimulus payments, may have provided capital for people to set out on their own.

Other metrics tell similar stories.

The share of self-employed Oregonians fell sharply in March and April but rebounded almost immediately to pre-pandemic levels, according to data from the Oregon Employment



Osborne

Department. A similar picture played out nationally.

And venture capital, the money entrepreneurs use to pursue especially ambitious ideas, is soaring to its highest level since the dot-com era.

Oregon startups raised just over \$1 billion in the first nine months of the year, nearly double the amount they raised during the same period in 2020, according to the quarterly report from the National Venture Capital Association and PitchBook. Oregon had 132 startups funded, up 25% from the same nine months in 2020.

New businesses rarely have it easy, of course. And the pandemic continues to present enormous challenges, from the omicron variant to supply-chain snarls and historic inflation.

"It's a challenging time to start a company because the future is less certain, I think, than it ever has been," Osborne said.

weather

AccuWeather forecast grid showing temperatures and conditions for tonight, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday for Baker City, La Grande, and Enterprise.

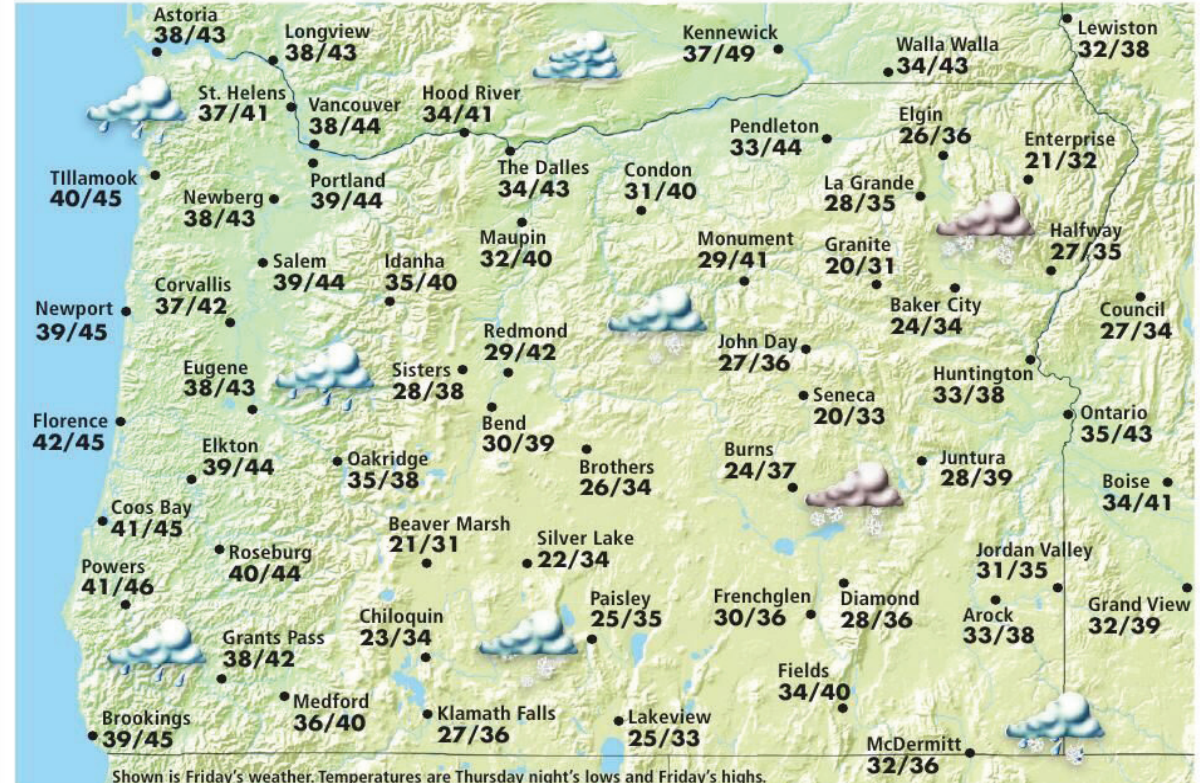
ALMANAC and TUESDAY EXTREMES sections providing historical weather data and national statistics.

AGRICULTURAL INFO. HAY INFORMATION FRIDAY section detailing humidity, wind, and sunshine.

RESERVOIR STORAGE and STREAM FLOWS sections listing water levels for various reservoirs.

Moon phases section showing the progression from Last to Full moon.

AROUND OREGON AND THE REGION



REGIONAL CITIES and RECREATION FORECAST FRIDAY sections providing specific weather forecasts for various locations and parks.