

Some state workers enjoy wage gains

State employees making \$100K or more jumped 23% in 2021

By HILLARY BORRUD
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon's roughly 38,000 state government workers enjoyed another year of wage growth in 2021, with median pay well above the state's overall workforce and more employees earning six-figure salaries.

The gains came during a tumultuous time for Oregon workers, as some in the private sector lost jobs and businesses while others enjoyed notable pay raises in the first full fiscal year of the pandemic.

The huge range of state jobs, including everything from cleaning staff and jobless benefit claim adjudicators to park rangers, investment managers and nurses at the state psychiatric hospital, had a median base pay of \$64,800 in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2021, according to The Oregonian's analysis of state pay data.

The median state salary is almost certainly somewhat higher than the analysis found because pay data provided by the state did not indicate which employees worked less than a full year. Median total pay, including overtime and other income such as accrued vacation payouts, equipment allowances and settlements, was \$70,200.

In contrast, Oregon's median wage for all jobs across the private and public sectors in 2021 was \$44,900, rounded to nearest \$100 according to Employment Department data.

Oregon's lowest state worker annual pay rate was a hair over \$15 an hour, almost \$2 more than the state's minimum wage in the Portland metropolitan area and \$3 more than the minimum in the 18 most rural counties in the state.

At the high end, 5,618 state employees brought home base pay of at least \$100,000 in fiscal year 2021, according to state data. That was a 23% increase from the previous year.

When overtime and other pay such as vacation payouts were included, 7,298 state workers earned total pay of at least \$100,000 in 2021, a 25% increase from the prior fiscal year.

Pay figures for fiscal year 2021 do not include one-time COVID hazard payments of \$1,550 the state issued to employees required to work in person during a portion of the first 16 months of the pandemic.

State workers are set to receive 5.6% cost-of-living raises by December 2022, paid for with the \$198 million pot for pay increases that lawmakers approved in the 2021 legislative session. Former House Speaker Tina Kotek, now running in the Democratic primary for governor, said during a debate hosted by the Oregon AFL-CIO that she made sure during her time in the Legislature that lawmakers appropriated generous amounts for pay "bargaining pots" because "we don't want people leaving public employment because they feel they're not being treated well."

Oregon government's own analysis of state worker compensation in early 2021 determined that, as of July 1, 2020, the state paid employees highly competitive salaries and benefits compared with key areas of the Pacific Northwest job market: 100.2% of market rate, due in large part to benefits including pensions and heavily subsidized health insurance plans, for which state workers paid just \$19 a month to insure their whole family.

Since then, state workers received a 3% cost-of-living adjustment and periodic increases in pay rates known as a step increase that on average boosted pay by 4.8%.

Oregon government agencies had 38,494 employees from July 2020 through June 2021 who were paid at least the minimum annual base salary of \$31,600. Nearly 10,000 additional

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LOCAL YARN-DYEING STORE

celebrates first anniversary of physical storefront

Rebel Woolworks embraces its role in downtown business landscape

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — What once started as a hobby and online store has elevated one local business owner's career into a full-on storefront in downtown La Grande.

Rebel Woolworks, a favored spot for locally dyed yarn, is thriving at 1113 Adams Ave. as it approaches its one-year anniversary. Owner Tara Sager has utilized the central location to expand the store's services and contribute to La Grande's downtown environment.

"It's been a whirlwind, but I'm really looking forward to next year," Sager said. "It's moved from what was a hobby turning into a business, into a business that is continuing to grow and expand."

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Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Rebel Woolworks owner Tara Sager poses for a picture behind the store's counter on Tuesday, July 20, 2021. The specialty store, which sells hand-dyed yarn and now includes a mercantile for artisan products, is set to celebrate the one-year anniversary of its physical storefront on Local Yarn Store Day, April 30, 2022.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

A selection of hand-dyed yarn, including Tara Sager's specialty "The Good Red," await shoppers and stitchers on Tuesday, July 20, 2021, at Rebel Woolworks, La Grande. The shop, which sells hand-dyed yarn and now includes a mercantile for artisan products, started as an online business before setting up at 1113 Adams Ave. in downtown.

EO Rental & Sales moving to former PGG site

La Grande-based Braseth Properties purchased site in 2021

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Remodeling the 42,000 square-foot former Pendleton Grain Growers headquarters, at 1000 SW Dorion Ave., remains a work in progress.

When completed, the premises will form the new home of Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales.

Braseth Properties LLC, of La Grande, bought the building and parking lot on

July 23, 2021, at auction for about \$1.8 million. The Pendleton branch of its subsidiary sales business will move from its present location at 338 NW 57th Drive to the ex-PGG site later this year.

"We're moving from up near the airport to downtown at the former PGG site," General Manager Dan Domey said.

The company has not set a grand opening date.

Besides Pendleton, Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales has locations in Baker City and La Grande and is doing business as NW Construction Supply Inc., of Pasco. It offers an extensive line of aerial work platforms and all-terrain forklifts.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Cars pass by the former Pendleton Grain Growers headquarters, 1000 SW Dorion Ave., Pendleton, on Wednesday, April 6, 2022. Braseth Properties LLC, doing business as Eastern Oregon Rentals & Storage in La Grande, is renovating the property.