

Local

Business Summit held locally

BY TODD ARRIOLA
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The Community Event Center, 2600 Cedar Street, Baker City, was host to the first Baker County Workforce Initiative Business Summit, a workshop held on Tuesday, November 8, 2016, at 8 a.m.

The Summit brought together between 50 and 60 area employers and representatives, in an effort to improve employer/employee relationships, to increase productivity, to retain people within, and to attract people to the County, and to boost the economy.

Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey welcomed the crowd, and explained the purpose himself, of the summit. He said the point was to try to bring together and to provide resources and opportunities, and information that would aid area employers in the hiring process, and in training and keeping employees in the County.

He said there are great success stories of County businesses, and, “We want to have more of them. We want to help people understand that we are, clearly, a community; we’re here to help one another, and to help those who want to come to Baker County...”

Harvey introduced the guest speaker, Kim Puzey, Port of Umatilla General Manager, who spoke about his background, and described different theories put into practice, related to improving workplace conditions, and employee productivity. These included adjusting brightness of workplace lighting, and making seating more comfortable, as examples. He said, “Motivated employees have better performance...” He noted two major factors associated with improving performance: recognition, and achievement.

Puzey said that it’s important for a business owner or manager to be adaptable, and to listen to what employees or potential employees are saying, in order to benefit both parties.

Harvey introduced Alice Trindle, of the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, who spoke about the history of County tourism. She said that the Baker County Chamber of Commerce first formed a committee to address tourism and improving the economy, in 1979. She said, “If we can get them (employees) to be motivated and happy at their jobs, and understand that they are part of an amazing experience, that ultimately, we would improve our bottom line, and improve the economy, for this county...(Tourism in Oregon) generates just shy of \$11 billion annually...” Baker County, she said, brings in about \$40



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

Baker County Chamber of Commerce Director Shelly Cutler speaks to participants.

million of that.

Trindle presented a couple of videos, which showcased local businesses and valuable resources, and in closing, she emphasized the importance of ambassadorship, and the economic impacts of tourism in Eastern Oregon.

Harvey introduced Dan Koopman, Blue Mountain Community College Baker City Director, who presented a slide show, as part of the “Hospitality: Service that Sells” segment of the summit. He provided some statistics first, among them, the following: the average American business loses 15% of its customer base each year; 68% of customers who stop buying from one business, and go to another, will do so due to poor or indifferent service; and 82% go somewhere else, because of a specific customer service issue.

His presentation included seven steps to creating a more productive work environment: developing a customer service mission statement; customer service is attitude AND action; base training; coaching employees; creative Thank Yous; functional walk-through; and engage, engage, engage. Koopman said, “Challenge your customer service folks every day, to learn three things...” in order to make a better connection with customers.

Harvey introduced Teri Berry, of Worksource Oregon, who presented information as part of the “Hiring Employees and Employee Retention” segment. As part of the segment, she included details about the cost to employers of turnovers, and the cost savings with using Worksource Oregon, in the hiring process.

The estimated cost of one employee, for example, she said, could be between 20% and 200% of an employee’s base salary. An example she gave, for an employee at \$13 per

hour, could be anywhere from \$5,408, to \$54,080, for a turnover. The cost of a turnover includes: separation costs, and an increase in overtime of other staff; diminished workplace morale; time and money spent hiring; and loss of productivity, until a trainee reaches full potential. A video she presented emphasized a potential federal tax benefit for an employer, when hiring certain workers: the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), an incentive, in the range of \$2,400 to \$9,600.

Richard Chaves, of Chaves Consulting, who discussed his background, and his business, and he said one of his goals was “...to create an environment, where people look forward to coming to work every day...It’s about appreciating and recognizing your employees...” He said Chaves Consulting currently employs 75.

Harvey introduced Shelly Cutler, Baker County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau Executive Director, who presented information, as part of the “Building our Business Environment” segment. She spoke about “community cross-selling,” a term which wasn’t familiar to many present. She explained what it means by using examples, the first one being a meal at Lone Pine Cafe enjoyed by a couple of tourists, during which a waiter suggests a drink in the form of Pallet Jack, from Barley Brown’s Brew Pub. This hypothetical involves a walk down Main Street, and discovering other businesses in the process, such as No. 1911, The Sycamore Tree, as well as others. The scenario included a hotel stay, at possibly the Best Western Sunridge Inn, or Motel 6. “Tourism, like Alice said, brings tons of money to Baker County...” She emphasized “...the value of cross-selling, to not only our tourists, but

also, to our community members...”

Cutler introduced community partners, including Baker County Economic Development Director Greg Smith; Smith’s staff, which includes his wife, Sherri, Julie Hicks, and Phil Scheuers; Baker City Manager Fred Ward, Jr., who introduced Baker County Developer Robin Nudd; Baker County Tourism Marketing Director Tim Bishop; Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center Advisor Jeff Nelson; Koopman; Baker Technical Institute Director Jerry Peacock; Business Oregon Business Development Officer Melisa Drugge; and Oregon Employment Department Manager Deb Gargalis.

Cutler spoke about some of the benefits of joining the Chamber of Commerce, including regular communication and feedback, support of local businesses, and networking value, by reaching out to others in the community, and being part of a “hub” for connections.

In closing, Smith said, “A lot of work went into preparing for today...” as he asked for recognition of the various community members and partners. He said the inspiration for the summit was a conversation between Smith and Harvey, and a community survey. In particular, he thanked Hicks for her effort in making the summit, which he said was a successful one, a reality. Smith said the plan is to hold this type of workshop quarterly, and the next one will include information presented from an employee viewpoint.

High-speed chase

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Oregon State Police (OSP), the Union County Sheriff’s Office, US Forest Service Law Enforcement, and BLM Law Enforcement joined in the search.

OSP considered bringing out their plane to search from the air, and the Woydziaks of the Baker City Airport offered up two of their own helicopters to aid in the search for the cost of fuel only. Neither option proved necessary.

Flores’ vehicle was found abandoned and it was clear he had fled on foot. Lohner said the road system was confusing and that the vehicle was found at a dead end. His own vehicle, he said, kept “bottoming out” and the location was clearly no place for police cruisers.

Lohner said they “followed a blocked-off road for a mile or a mile and a half.” That was just before noon.

At around 1:15 p.m., law enforcement spotted Flores about 200 yards away, highly visible in a white T-shirt, heading west along a roadway near Bazine Creek on the other side of a meadow.

Flores continued to run into brush and climbed a hill out of sight, heading west toward Highway 203. Reports from a local citizen helped locate Flores as he was heading toward Highway 203.

Ash writes, “After phone contact was made with Flores, he was taken into custody without incident and transported to the Baker County Jail.” That arrest happened at 2:28 p.m.

Lohner said he and other officers waited for Five Star Towing to arrive and remove the vehicle before heading back to Baker City.

Along with the original warrants, Flores was additionally charged with Attempt to Elude, Reckless Driving and Escape in the Third Degree.

Shots not fired in spite of reports

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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Hot on the heels of returning from a high-speed chase and foot pursuit, Baker City Police Officers returned to their Department to a report of shots fired within the Baker City Limits late Tuesday afternoon.

Six officers blanketed the reported area, only to be repeatedly redirected, eventually zeroing in on the Middle School area, said Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner shortly after finding the reason for the big bang.

That reason? A group of Middle School students had placed stolen dry ice into a container near the school, causing an eventual explosion that was mistaken as gunfire. The case is still under investigation.



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Tennis court correction

Last week’s issue covered a City Planning Commission meeting to discuss conditional use permit violations occurring at the

tennis courts owned by Don McClure.

The article stated that Joanna McCormick initiated the September

complaint. In fact, Pauli Payne filed the complaint. McCormick, however, was present at the meeting to testify.

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