

Crisis drives up business for Astoria pawnshop

Guns and video games flying off shelves during the coronavirus pandemic



The Pawnshop and More manager Troy Dodge looks on as a customer inspects a gun he purchased on Friday, May 29 at The Pawnshop and More in Astoria. Firearm sales in Oregon and Washington have been record setting in recent months. In March, background checks in Oregon soared to nearly 60,000, almost double the average performed over the same period in 2019. In Washington more than 75,000 background checks were performed, roughly 15,000 more than 2019.

Story and Photos by Luke Whittaker

Coast River Business Journal
lwhittaker@crbizjournal.com

ASTORIA — One bought a gun, another took home a hedge trimmer, and several others poured over the guitars and gaming section.

It was a typical Friday at The Pawnshop and More in downtown Astoria, where in a span of less than 30 minutes an assortment of customers from all walks found their way into the Commercial Street store.

Over the past several weeks, since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, the pawnshop has increasingly been a beacon for those hoping to get by in the midst of rising unemployment and shuttered storefronts.

“We’ve been open the whole time,” said store manager Troy Dodge, standing behind a glass case of gold jewelry and flanked by a wall of firearms.

“We’re not a bank but we’re considered a financial institution. We help people, especially in this time of need financially.”

Games and guns

Beginning in March, around the start of the covid-19 pandemic, Dodge noticed a rush of customers coming to retrieve collateral-based loans.

“There was a lot of panic at first,” Dodge said. “People were

pulling their stuff out of pawn because they thought our doors would be closed and they would lose their items. They spent whatever they had to get whatever they could out. Things are coming back into stock now as they need money. A lot of people aren’t getting unemployment.”

Demand for gaming systems grew during the pandemic, particularly for the Nintendo Switch, which sold 55 million units overall in March, nearly double the amount in March 2019 and by far the most since its 2017 release. Larger retailers have struggled to keep the popular console in stock and many have sought second-hand games and systems at pawnshops as an alternative.

“Gaming systems are really important right now because many people are at home. It’s been a big seller. People need something to do while they’re sitting at home,” Dodge said.

Gun sales skyrocket

The rack of rifles has dwindled over the past several weeks as demand continues to surge for firearms, Dodge said.

Historically, terrorist attack and mass shootings have spurred gun sales, sometimes for several weeks. However, the recent rise in demand seems to be driven by angst and uncertainty in the economy.

“We’re not getting guns in so much. We still have an inventory but it’s weak compared to what it was. A lot of gun stores were bought out,” Dodge said.

Gun buyers are required to complete a background check

through the National Instant Background Check System (NICS) at the point of purchase for firearms. The background checks are compiled on a nationwide database and serve as a barometer of gun sales state to state. Five of the top-10 highest days ever for background checks nationwide occurred in March. The peak occurred between March 16 and March 22, when 1,197,788 background checks were performed — 244,175 more than the second-highest total between Dec. 17 and Dec. 23, 2012.

The Pawnshop and More
1139 Commercial St., Astoria
305-741-3477
Pawnshopandmore.com

Firearm sales in Oregon and Washington have been record-setting over the same period. In March, background checks in Oregon soared to nearly 60,000, almost double the average performed over the same period in 2019. In Washington more than 75,000 background checks were performed, roughly 15,000 more than 2019.

“It shot all the way up to 3,000 daily. Now it’s still hovering between 100 to 200,” Dodge said regarding the daily background checks in Oregon.