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Industry Spotlight:

Clatsop County construction

Robust demand keeping commercial and residential builders busy



Contractors work on the Blue Heron Pointe subdivision in Seaside.

Story and Photos by Edward Stratton

Coast River Business Journal
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Construction projects briefly shut down when Oregon enacted restrictions in March to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

“We were midway through building three homes when most of the state shut down,” said Max Ritchie, a developer behind the 54-unit Blue Heron Pointe subdivision in Seaside. “Thankfully, we didn’t have to pause projects mid-construction. We were able to continue after a brief delay.”

Commercial and residential construction is fairing better than most during the virus, buoyed like real estate by high demand and activity.

Lingering uncertainty

Construction, which makes up about 6% of private employment in Clatsop County, lost around 130 jobs between February and May, when there were 880 such positions. Construction workers were only 270 of the 4,833 unemployment claims filed by county residents from March through June, said workforce analyst Shawna Sykes, and only about 100 of their claims have continued through May.

Construction companies in the county clawed back 20 jobs in May’s unemployment report from the state, although still down 140 from the same time last year.

Ritchie, who is also developing the Gearhart Meadows subdivision, noticed a brief slowdown in construction and said the market for imports like tile, appliances and light fixtures also got tight. But the market has stabilized, and it’s been business as usual.

The local housing market is booming. Builders are still seeing a demand for and building mostly higher-priced homes increasingly out-of-reach for first-time buyers.

“The most lasting impact is uncertainty,” Ritchie said. “There’s so much we just don’t know right now.”

Booming real estate

The local housing market, driven in large part by people from out of town and state, moving, retiring and buying second homes on the North Coast, is still booming. Builders are still seeing a demand for and building mostly higher-priced homes increasingly out-of-reach for first-time buyers.

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