

Keizertimes

SECTION A

SEPTEMBER 14, 2018

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By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

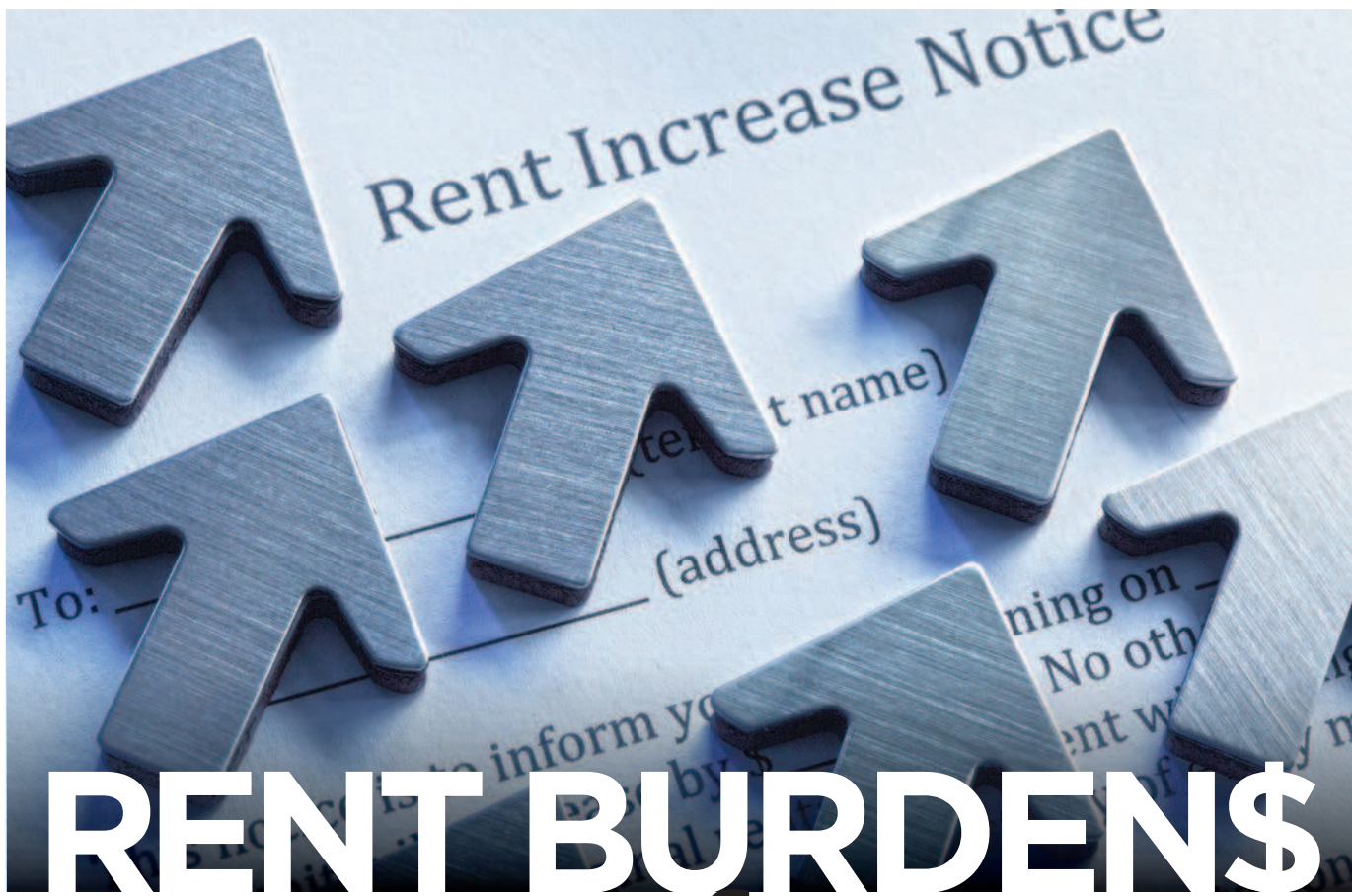
Keizer is now one of more than two dozen Oregon cities classified as severely rent burdened by the Department of Housing and Community Services.

The news came in the form of a letter from the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services to city leaders as part of a new legislative requirement. The designation as a severely rent burdened city means that more than a quarter of renter households are paying more than 50 percent of the household gross income on rent. In Keizer, 27 percent of renters, about 1,400 households, fall into the severely rent burdened category.

In the overall picture, Keizer is just over the line that triggered the designation, but the city is required to address the issue. City officials must convene a public meeting to discuss the causes and consequences of rent burdens, the barriers to reducing rent and possible solutions.

The effect of rent burden is striking current city residents in a variety of ways, and at different stages of life.

Christine Braning Reed felt a sense of sticker shock as she began looking for an apartment when the rent on the home she was living in increased beyond her means. Most apartment complexes required an income of at least three times the monthly rent on the applications. Reed's household income, which includes a disabled



RENT BURDEN\$ draw eye of state

daughter, is roughly \$2,800 a month between PERS and Social Security benefits. The rent on a two-bedroom apartment is roughly \$1,000 in Keizer.

"I had to downsize so much it was unreal. We had two weekends of garage sales and then I just junked the rest. I saved what I wanted for my kids and put it in storage so I have the bill (\$160). I have had to really curb the grocery shopping because I can't buy in the bulk because there is no storage here in the apartment," Reed said.

While each act of culling her possessions was difficult, she's had the most trouble adjusting to the little things, now gone, that made her house feel like a home.

"I had to give up all my potted plants that I love because we can't have that much on the porch or grounds. I was told we don't rent the outside. I loved having fushia plants hanging on my porch and I can no longer do that. I had to give up my rose gardens and some of the roses I had planted at the house were

from my husband's funeral," she said. Reed's husband died of a terminal illness in 2006, between that and the housing crisis, her brother purchased her home and allowed her to pay below-market rent for the past decade.

Adding to Reed's current hardships, she was recently diagnosed with breast cancer that, between co-pays and surgeries, will only add to the budget crunch she was already feeling.

"I am only hoping that God continues to provide for me. I thought this move

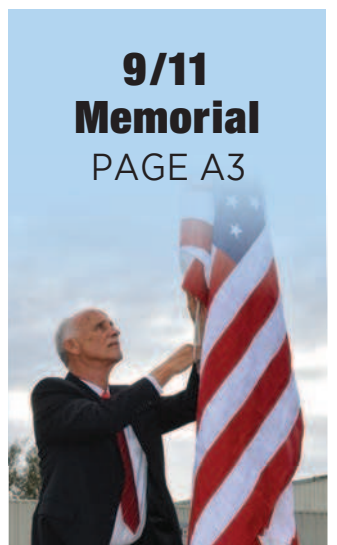
I would be able to save some money but now with the cancer I don't know what I am going to do. I might have to go get a part time job. I don't know," she said.

When Keizertimes asked Facebook readers about their experiences with rent burdens, multiple commenters noted their rent has climbed by leaps and bounds in recent years often with little or no renovation to the facilities themselves. Some reported their rents had increased by \$500 or more in the past six years and several had taken on

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MHS football fields female kicker
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9/11 Memorial
PAGE A3

Grant may make RR crossing quieter

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The City of Keizer is applying for a federal grant that, if successful, could mean a quieter railroad crossing on Chemawa Road North-east near Keizer Station.



The city council approved moving forward with the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant application at its meeting Tuesday, Sept. 4. A 2016 estimate from Burlington Northern to retrofit the space as a quiet crossing came in at \$123,000. Those costs are likely to have increased and Keizer would be required to provide a 50 percent match, but city's street fund is flush enough to cover the expense.

"The grant focused on safety, so we have an uphill battle, but this has been an issue in our community," said Community Development Director Nate Brown. The crossing was updated about a decade ago and meets acceptable safety standards, which could contribute to the uphill battle.

The current stationary horn at the crossing reverberates through nearby residence most hours of the day

Please see CROSS, Page A10

Council candidates focused on growth

DeBlasi competes to secede Anderson

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

When Michael DeBlasi moved to Keizer from the Medford area six years ago, he didn't waste any time before getting involved.

DeBlasi, a resource coordinator with the Department of State Lands, was appointed to Keizer's Planning Commission in September 2013 and has maintained the role ever since. More recently, he joined the Keizer Traffic Safety, Bikeways and Pedestrian Committee and now he's set his sights on replacing outgoing City Councilor Bruce Anderson in the November election. Anderson is stepping aside, but DeBlasi will face Dan Kohler in the election.

"I felt this would be the next logical step," DeBlasi said. "At the time, I didn't know that Bruce and Amy (Ryan) weren't running, but I felt there were some differences in how they viewed growth and how I do."

DeBlasi views the city as an ecosystem all its own, and that development should take place in such a way as to



Michael DeBlasi

support other elements.

"I don't want River Road to turn into a Lancaster or streets like that where people are whizzing by giant parking lots and big signs. I want to see development that is financially beneficial and improves the quality of life," he said. "It's not a traditional downtown street and any development should move in a direction away from [Lancaster's design]."

In somewhat recent discussions about a Safeway fueling center at planning commission meetings, DeBlasi frequently voiced concerns over allowing it to go forward. Allowing the gas station near the center of the city would likely mean it would be a fueling center for the foreseeable future with little alternative other than someday tearing it down and replacing it.

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Smith runs to follow Ryan

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Elizabeth Smith's crash course in how Keizer grows began 23 years ago when she moved to the city working in the banking industry.

Smith was often one of the first people new residents met when they came in to open accounts, but changes at home added other dimensions.

"Before Weddle Elementary School happened, my kids went to three different elementary schools and we never moved," Smith said.

Smith is running to replace Keizer City Councilor Amy Ryan who is stepping aside. Her opponent in the contested election will be Shawn Lapof.

Smith, who is now a home loan sales manager with Caliber Home Loans, said the close attention she's paid to Keizer growth throughout her career make her a good fit for the council, particularly as some of the biggest conversations happening at City Hall are turning toward the city's future.

"I'm very detail-oriented because the person I have to convince in my job is an underwriter dealing with data



Elizabeth Smith

and rules," said Smith. However, as wife to a disabled veteran and mother to a child who struggled with addiction in the past, she's gained appreciation for the social aspects of fiscal decisions.

"We often think a system is working, but then hear that it is not working from the people using that system. When people get emotional it's because there's something behind it," Smith said.

Aside from her work in the financial sectors, Keizer's current growth trajectory has had a direct effect on her business. She recently had to relocate her office to Salem because Keizer simply didn't have the type of office space required by Caliber Home Loans' corporate office.

"It was still difficult to find in Salem, but we don't have that here at all," Smith said.

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Salem-Keizer football round-up
PAGE B4



Lady Celts fall to West Salem
PAGE B1



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