

Local restaurant inspection scores getting better

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Restaurants in Umatilla County and Morrow County are safer and more sanitary than they were three years ago, according to the latest round of restaurant inspection scores published by the health department.

Of all 213 establishments, 47 percent achieved a perfect score when subjected to an unannounced inspection between June and December 2015. During the same time period three years earlier, only 26 percent of the 185 restaurants had a perfect score.

During the second half of 2015 three local restaurants — Ruty's, Panda Inn and Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe in Hermiston — failed their initial inspections. Ruty's and Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe passed by a significant margin when re-inspected about a week later. There is not a score on file for Panda Inn's re-inspection.

The latest release of restaurant inspection scores have been making the rounds on Facebook as people warn their friends to stay away from certain eateries, but Umatilla County Public Health inspector Joseph Fuimara said it's important to keep in mind that the scores come from what an inspector observed

More online
Check out the full list of restaurant scores online at www.eastoregonian.com

during a single visit in a six-month time period.

"It's a snapshot," he said. "Good restaurants can have a bad day when we're there, and bad restaurants can have a good day, so you have to take it with a grain of salt."

Fuimara has only been with Umatilla County Public Health for a month, but he spent eight years before that performing inspections in Walla Walla County.

Probably the biggest issue most restaurants have, he said, comes with the guidelines for holding food at certain temperatures.

Another common issue is separating different types of foods. He said sometimes in their bid to conserve space, employees will pack cooling and freezing areas so tightly that raw meat or eggs end up sitting on top of vegetables or fruit, which could cause cross-contamination.

"Just because we write a violation doesn't mean that (cross-contamination) has happened, it just means that the conditions are there that it could," he said.

Fuimara said another issue is finding food on non-food handling surfaces, such as crumbs on the kitchen floor or sauce splashed on the wall.

"That isn't a huge issue by itself, but it can become one," he said, noting that not cleaning up spills promptly can attract pests.

Although the vast majority of restaurants in Umatilla County and Morrow County usually pass with flying colors, in the second half of 2015 Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe, Panda Inn and Ruty's in Hermiston did not.

During its initial inspection Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe received a score of 46 after an inspector spotted violations that included food stored past its expiration date, no paper towels near the handwashing sink, improperly labeled or mixed cleaning chemicals, burn cream stored above food, a broken thermometer, surfaces not being cleaned as often as required and an employee failing to wash their hands after taking a customer's dirty plate back to the kitchen.

However, the restaurant fixed enough of the issues to score an 83 when re-inspected a few days later and was in the process of fixing others, including ordering a new thermometer and proper light covers.

During its initial inspection

Ruty's received a score of 55 after violations including missing paper towels and soap at a handwashing sink, vegetables stored at 44 degrees instead of 41, uncooked meat stored next to other foods and employees not washing their hands as often as required by law.

On its second inspection less than a week later Ruty's passed with a score of 95.

Panda Inn received a 62 on its first inspection for violations including employees not washing hands as often as required, chicken sitting out at room temperature, items in the salad bar being kept at 44 degrees instead of 41 degrees and mouse droppings in the back storage room.

A second inspection was scheduled to be completed by another county during the gap between the former health inspector's departure and Fuimara's start date, but Fuimara said he merely has a note marking the inspection completed without giving a score.

Several restaurants that had scores below 80 during the first half of 2015 improved in the second to a 95 or better during their most recent inspection, including Sub Zero Restaurant and Lounge in Irrigon, Golden Village Restaurant in Milton-Freewater, Hale's in Hermiston and El Erradero in Stanfield.

Establishments must score at least a 70 to pass. If they don't they are given up to two weeks to correct the problems before a re-inspection. If they fail again the health department will shut them down.

Umatilla County Public Health director Meghan DeBolt said that it's very rare for a restaurant to be shut down, because in her experience health violations are nearly always an oversight that owners are more than willing to correct when it is pointed out to them.

She said the department's desire is to protect public health and safety without impeding economic development.

"We really take an education approach," she said. "We try not to be punitive and slap on a bunch of fines."

She did say the department was looking at possibly adding a fee for re-inspections to reflect the cost of inspectors coming back out a second time, but if fees were raised it wouldn't happen until 2017.

DeBolt said it is rare to see instances of food-borne illness in Umatilla and Morrow Counties, something she said local restaurant owners deserve a lot of credit for.

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PLUTE: Back taxes have incurred heavy interest

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started making tax payments and expects to settle his debt by May.

Plute also refused to back off from his steadfast and vocal support for more tax revenue for the city, despite his delinquency.

"I'm not changing my mind just because I owe a few bucks," he said.

Plute said his delinquent taxes will ultimately benefit

the city's coffers because of the heavy interest his back taxes have incurred.

"They penalize you like hell to pay your taxes late," he said.

Pendleton Citizens United, the group that is campaigning to recall Plute, noted the unpaid taxes were a reason for their action.

In a Feb. 15 letter to the *East Oregonian*, committee member James Humphrey decried that Plute's limited

liability companies were up to four years behind in their property tax payments, including on the Bowman and the St. George.

"A person who is in a position of deciding if new fees and taxes are to be levied on the citizenry should first pay his own," Humphrey wrote.

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BRIEFLY

Daren Strong appointed Irrigon mayor pro tem

IRRIGON — The Irrigon City Council appointed councilor Daren Strong as mayor pro tem at its meeting Tuesday evening.

Strong was nominated by fellow councilors, along with Michelle Hagen. Strong was selected by a 3-1 vote. Councilor Ken Matlack was absent from the meeting.

As mayor pro tem, Strong will assume mayoral duties when the current mayor, Sam Heath, is unavailable. The mayor presides over city council meetings and is a non-voting member of the council.

Strong takes over as mayor pro tem for Christine Sorenson, who died Jan. 18 of congenital heart failure. She was 72.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist said the council vacancy left by Sorensen has been advertised, and could be filled as early as March 15. Whoever is appointed will finish the remainder of Sorensen's term, which runs through the end of the year.

Smith takes seat on Small Business Advisory Cabinet

SALEM — Republican Rep. Greg Smith of Heppner was named to Gov. Kate Brown's Small Business Advisory Cabinet.

Brown, a Democrat, created the cabinet earlier this month and on Tuesday afternoon her office announced its membership. Smith is one of nine in the cabinet.

Brown charged the group with developing recommendations to her on how state government can support small business owners, new entrepreneurs and advance statewide economic growth. The cabinet will deliver recommendations on three priorities by Oct 1: How state government can support and promote small business owners

and prospective entrepreneurs; how state government can increase access to capital; and how the state can streamline regulations.

EOU honors three local teachers with awards

Three local teachers have been honored by former students in the "Inspirational Teacher Awards" from Eastern Oregon University.

EOU first-year honor students who maintained dean's list standing during fall term nominated 26 teachers from Oregon, Washington, California and Nevada. Students were asked to choose teachers who influenced them on their road to higher education and academic excellence.

At Hermiston High School, 2015 graduates Shay Lovejoy and Breanna Hughes nominated Paul Dunsmoor, a member of the band staff.

Makayla Mangione, also a 2015 graduate of Hermiston High, nominated Tim Zacharias, a former member of the English staff.

"Tim Zacharias goes out of his way to challenge his students, giving them the tools they need to succeed," Mangione said via email. "He encouraged me to think deeper, write better and to engage in a myriad of disciplines beyond my preferred course of study. His mentorship inspired me to pursue a career in English education so that I too can help students succeed."

Karla Bedolla, a 2015 graduate of Umatilla High School, nominated Keith Gebers, business communication and computer systems teacher at UHS.

"To be nominated by one of my ex-students is high praise and means a lot to me. I have been fortunate to work with some of the best and brightest the state of Oregon has to offer," Gebers said Tuesday.

COUNCIL: Councilor Brown said Chalmers was a friend

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Unfortunately, we live in a time where government isn't well trusted but that has to be something that's established through relationships."

Despite seeing his department shrink from 33 employees in 1990 to 17 in 2016, Chalmers said they still consistently collected taxes at 93-95 percent rate.

Recurrent themes throughout the interviews included housing, industrial growth and communication with the public.

Jim Swearingen touted his experience as the co-owner of J & B Automotive and his nine years on the Round-Up Board of Directors, where he more than quadrupled souvenir sales the first year he was in charge of that department.

Lary Anderson, the retired owner of the Main

Street Diner and a member of the committee trying to recall Councilor Al Plute, said he was a "good salesman" but also admitted he opposed the 5-cent gas tax, something he "retroactively" supports.

Retiree Paul Rabitaille said he wants to bring "family-oriented business" to Pendleton and said he won't be detriment to the council.

"I don't know that it would be better, but I don't think it would be any worse," he said, spurring laughter from the council.

James Tibbets, a self-employed computer repairman convicted of a hate crime, continued to pitch his tech savvy and his desire to increase the town's computer literacy.

While none of the councilors announced why they were voting for Chalmers, familiarity was on his side.

In addition to serving on

the Pendleton Development Commission Advisory Committee, Councilor Neil Brown said Chalmers was a friend, Councilor Tom Young praised him for his customer service and Councilor Al Plute said they played golf together.

The appointment makes Chalmers the nominal incumbent in the four-way race for the at-large seat.

Right now, Chalmers will face Rabitaille, Swearingen and Rick Rohde in the May 17 municipal election. Anderson and Tibbets have not filed for that election. The filing deadline is March 8.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

Umatilla Electric Scholarship Program



Umatilla Electric is offering the following scholarships for the 2016-17 school year:

Academic Scholarships - 12 \$2,500 scholarships are available for members of UEC and/or their dependent children who receive electric service from UEC at their primary residence, and are enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate program at a two- or four-year college. Apply online at www.oregonstudentaid.gov by **March 1, 2016**.

Electrical Engineering Scholarship - a \$5,000 scholarship is administered to a college student who has completed their freshman year and is interested in pursuing a degree in Electrical Engineering-Power Systems. Apply by **March 1, 2016** at www.oregonstudentaid.gov

Lineman Scholarship - a \$2,000 scholarship is available to members and/or applicants whose parent or guardian is an active member who receive electric service from UEC at their primary residence, and are interested in the Line Construction trade and will be attending an accredited Line College. Apply by **March 1, 2016**. Go to www.umatillaelectric.com to download the application.

UEC wants to help make college accessible to our young members. We hope you apply.

For more information about UEC's scholarship program, visit our offices in Hermiston or Boardman online at www.umatillaelectric.com. You can also call us for more information at 541-564-6414 or the Oregon Student Access and Completion (OSAC) at 1-800-452-8807.