

HERMISTON: Rentals can be hard to find, especially for short-term workers

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continuing education credits required for an Oregon license.

“The shortage of labor has been real challenging, but I think the market is prime,” he said.

Pickerill also said while he loves the community of Hermiston, and has seen some good support, it is also taking a while to educate people on the process of buying a home from a large-scale production home builder.

MonteVista Homes builds customized homes for buyers, which Pickerill said is a real risk for the company if something happens to the buyer and the company is stuck with a very personalized home. But he said sometimes people want to pay as little as \$500 in a downpayment before the company starts work, and get offended when that’s not considered enough “earnest money.”

“That’s less of a downpayment than you give for a car,” he said.

He said the homes MonteVista is building are generally more than \$230,000 because there seemed to be a gap in the market for longtime residents looking to upgrade.

A recent study by financial company SmartAsset showed

the average annual mortgage payment in Hermiston is \$6,205. That, combined with the average property tax and homeowner’s insurance payments, works out to a cost of about \$738 per month to own a home.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that median rent was \$718 a month, but renting a home or an apartment in Hermiston can be tough. Patty Looman of Hermiston Property Management said right now the only properties her company has available are a three bedroom apartment and a five bedroom house.

“There is a need for more properties for people to rent in the area,” she said.

Looman said if people can afford to be patient, they will find something. But sometimes people who are coming in for just a few months for a construction job or have a special situation like a pet they can’t leave behind run into problems.

“That is a huge struggle,” she said. “I had five calls in the last two days of people needing somewhere pet friendly and we have nothing.”

She said she can’t blame landlords for not wanting to open their properties to pets, however, after seeing situations where tenants’ animals

caused thousands of dollars of damage to properties.

When people do have a problem finding rentals in Hermiston, Looman said they often end up finding something in Umatilla, Stanfield, Echo or Irrigon.

According to 2014 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, only 44 percent of people who work in the Hermiston zipcode also live there. That’s lower than communities like Pendleton and The Dalles, but significantly higher than Boardman, where only 16 percent of workers live in the city.

In 2011 the city of Hermiston commissioned a study by Pitney Bowes Business Insight of the “local trade area,” which encompassed Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo. At the time the study estimated 90 percent of housing units in the area were occupied.

The study also found that 23 percent of Hermiston-area households were one-person households, 36 percent were two-person households, 31 percent had three or four people and 11 percent had more than four people living together.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.



Dance on

ABOVE: Ashleigh Bolling and Jeneal Meriman dance during a performance by Pendleton High School’s Rythmic Mode on the first night of OSAA State Dance/Drill Championships dancing a routine called “Travel Light.”

LEFT: Charla Simons dances during Pendleton High School’s Rythmic Mode.

Photos by Debbi Green

POT TAX: Some payments made in cash

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marijuana on a temporary basis in Oct. 1. In January, the tax took effect at a rate of 25 percent. The tax will be reduced to 17 percent when the licensed recreational retailers take over sales sometime in early 2017.

Out of Oregon’s 309 dispensaries, 253 made payments to the revenue department in January.

Joy Krawczyk, spokeswoman for Oregon Department of Revenue, said the agency is reaching out to dispensaries that didn’t

submit a payment to make sure owners are aware of the regulations.

The federal ban on marijuana has prevented some Oregon dispensaries from being able to obtain financial services from banks and credit unions. As a result, those dispensaries deal only in cash. The revenue department carved out a special office with security and surveillance cameras to receive cash payments for tax bills, Krawczyk said. Dispensary owners who can’t submit a payment by

check or money order have to travel to Salem to pay the tax bill in cash.

Mark and Cindy Cusick of Salem’s Herbal Grasslands are among those who paid their taxes in cash.

The couple delivered \$8,400 in cash to the revenue department in early February to pay their January tax bill, Mark Cusick said.

“I’ve carried that much cash before,” he said. “Obviously, it’s not the most comfortable feeling in the world.”

He said the taxes were about what he expected.

PENDLETON: 21 housing permits were issued in 2015, down from year prior

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The city is looking for ways to more attract housing developments like Pendleton Heights and want to use an updated housing study to help achieve that goal.

The city, Blue Mountain Community College, Round-Up Development Corp., Umatilla County and Pacific Power are sponsoring a housing study to be completed this summer.

While plenty of low-income housing is available — 433 rental

units according to Oregon Housing and Community Services — these local government entities are trying to find housing for middle-income renters.

The purchase market isn’t much easier.

Although real estate website Trulia states the average home sells for \$138,000, Elaine Anderson of Umpqua Bank said at a previous housing committee meeting that some of her clients frequently look for property in the \$100,000 to \$150,000 range but can’t

find any.

With the exception of four new houses at Sunridge Estates and the construction at Pendleton Heights, there wasn’t too much other activity in 2015.

One of the more promising leads — a proposed apartment complex at the site of a former police shooting range — fell through when the developer backed out.

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

STORK: Baby cries, dad cries, dispatcher cries

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as her night shift was ending three days before Thanksgiving.

The morning had been quiet, she said. Then she picked up the next 9-1-1 call and a man screamed into the line, “The baby’s coming, the baby’s coming!”

There also was a good deal of swearing, she said, much of that in Spanish. But she worked through the delivery instructions — and questions that come with them — while at the same time trying to keep the father calm.

She said she asked him if this was their first child.

No, came the reply. This was to be the fifth.

Koehler also had to dispatch the ambulance herself. The same crew that responded to the other birth responded to this one on South Edwards Road near Stanfield.

Koehler said the father started screaming again when he saw the head. Moments later, she said, the baby cried. Right after, the father cried.

“Then I started to cry,” Koehler said.

This time, the infant was a boy. The call lasted about 10 minutes, she said, and was not just at the end of her shift, it was the end of her work

week.

Still, they said, these rare calls to deliver babies are really no different than any calls that come in.

“It’s the same mindset we enter,” Koehler. “We don’t get to be upset, we don’t get to let the call get out of control.”

And the operators have to be ready to move on to the next one. But LeGore and Winnett did celebrate — they took a second for a high-five.

Umatilla County sheriff’s Capt. Kathy Lieuallen, the 9-1-1 manager, would not provide contact information for the families of the babies, citing privacy laws.



Jacob Tyler Jones



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