



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Valentine's Day is one of the busiest days of the year at Virgil's At Cimmiyotti's in Pendleton.

CIMMIYOTTI'S: Ranked third on a list of the most romantic restaurants in Oregon

Continued from 1A

Marilyn with a laugh.

Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's has hosted its own fair share of proposals and anniversaries, too, Keeton said. She particularly remembers Bruce Boylen and his late wife, Karen, who shared their first date at the restaurant and came back for their 50th anniversary. Bruce keeps a framed picture of himself and Karen at the booth where the two would always eat.

"That was really special," Keeton said.

Last year, Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's was ranked third on a list of the most romantic restaurants in Oregon on the website Only in Oregon. Keeton said Valentine's Day is always busy with reservations — one year they served dinner to 300 people.

Founded by Paul and Ann Cimmiyotti in 1959, Keeton took over Cimmiyotti's in 2009. The restaurant had been closed and was on the verge of being gutted when she decided to make the move up from California.

"I just knew it needed to



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Katie Warhol and Jessica Hitzman fold napkins while preparing for Valentine's Day on Monday at Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's in Pendleton.

be saved," Keeton said. "It was like an empire that had crumbled. It needed to come back to life."

Keeton, a longtime waitress, had always dreamed of opening her own restaurant and naming it after her father, Virgil. Today, both names

adorn the sign over the entrance.

Keeton said she is grateful to have so many people who come and share their experiences with her. As for Tuesday, she said she wanted her guests "to want for nothing."

"I just want them to be taken care of, and to thoroughly enjoy their food and time with either their friends or loved ones," she said.

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Two big insurance breakups on Valentine's Day

By TOM MURPHY
AP Health Writer

It was a rough day for the already-roiled U.S. health insurance market: One giant merger was abandoned, another is threatened by infighting, and a major insurer announced it will stop selling coverage on public exchanges in 11 states.

Both merger deals had already been rejected by federal regulators and judges, but the companies were considering appeals to those decisions. Now they both appear to be off.

Aetna said it was abandoning its planned \$34 billion purchase of Medicare Advantage provider Humana early Tuesday. Then, later in the day, Cigna said it is suing Anthem to kill a \$48 billion acquisition bid.

The deals were conceived as a way to help the insurers increase their enrollment and cut down on expenses in part so they could improve their performances on the Affordable Care Act's public insurance exchanges. Big insurers have been hit with substantial losses from the exchanges, even though they represent a relatively small part of their overall business. Many have already cut back their offerings, and that has slashed customer choices in markets around the country.

The collapse of one deal and the uncertain future of the other could hurt shoppers on the exchanges next year by leaving them with even fewer options and potentially higher prices. Humana told investors late Tuesday that it was abandoning its exchanges in all 11 of its states as of the beginning of next year.

Humana, based in Louisville, Kentucky, was the



AP Photo/Jessica Hill, File

Aetna and Humana are calling off a \$34 billion deal to combine the two major health insurers after a federal judge, citing antitrust concerns, shot down the deal.

only insurer on exchanges in 16 Tennessee counties, according to data compiled at the start of the 2017 open enrollment period by the Associated Press and health care consulting firm Avalere. That means customers in those counties may have no way to buy coverage with help from government tax credits next year unless another insurer decides to enter those markets.

Every exchange in the U.S. had at least one insurer selling coverage on it for 2017, according to Larry Levitt of the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation, which studies health care issues.

Morningstar insurance analyst Vishnu Lekraj said it's possible all the four insurers involved in the deals could leave the exchanges.

Aetna Chairman and CEO Mark Bertolini raised that possibility months ago. He said that if his company's planned, was blocked, "we believe it is very likely that we would need to leave the public exchange business entirely," according to court documents filed in that case.

Aetna, based in Hartford, Connecticut, says it lost

\$450 million last year on ACA-compliant coverage, while the company booked an overall profit of \$2.27 billion. Its loss on ACA-compliant business was \$100 million more than it expected.

Bertolini said recently that his company would announce by April 1 whether it will remain in any of its exchanges. "We're looking at everything," he said.

Government and industry officials have said President Donald Trump's administration and congressional Republicans are weighing measures to stabilize the wobbly exchanges. Insurers have been pushing them to act soon.

"The clock is definitely ticking for the Trump administration to provide some clarity around what the rules will be," Levitt said.

In suing to end its tie-up, Cigna, based in Bloomfield, Connecticut, said it wants more than \$13 billion in damages from its onetime-companion Anthem, the Blue Cross-Blue Shield insurer, which is based in Indianapolis.

Cigna says it is seeking a \$1.85 billion termination fee from Anthem and billions

more in damages for what it says were Anthem's breaches of the merger agreement.

The insurer says the damages include the amount Cigna shareholders would have received if the merger had not failed. It noted that Anthem assumed full responsibility for litigation strategy and getting the necessary regulatory approvals, suggesting that it was Anthem's responsibility to push the deal through.

"Cigna fulfilled all of its contractual obligations and fully cooperated with Anthem throughout the approval process," the insurer said in a statement.

An Anthem spokeswoman says Cigna has no right to end the deal, and it remains committed to closing the transaction. The insurer had just filed on Monday paperwork to appeal the federal court ruling.

Anthem and Aetna put their acquisition bids together in 2015 and touted them as a way to grow enrollment and reap savings that they would then pass on to consumers.

The deal would have given Aetna the opportunity to significantly expand its presence in Medicare Advantage coverage, which involves privately run versions of the federal Medicare program for people who are over 65 or disabled.

But the Department of Justice had sued last summer to stop the deals, due to concerns about how they may affect prices and consumer choices. Federal judges then rejected the acquisitions in separate rulings filed earlier this year.

The deals would have combined four of the nations' five largest insurers. UnitedHealth Group is the largest.

FOREST: The two new alternatives could double the pace of restoration

Continued from 1A

be a 90-day objection period after the final EIS is issued, and it could take six months or more to work through objections.

Certainly, the plan has proven a lightning rod for controversy since a draft environmental analysis was released in 2014. While not a decision-making document in and of itself, it does set desired conditions for everything in the woods from fire protection and logging to wilderness and road access.

The proposal drew so much fire that the Forest Service decided to take a step back in 2015 and re-engage through a series of public meetings. Through that process, Montoya said officials heard from locals who wanted to see them pick up the pace and scale of restoration to make the forests more healthy, while also protecting old growth trees.

That's what the two new alternatives will seek to address in different ways, Montoya said.

"We continue to have that dialogue," he said.

The Forest Service was on track to have the final EIS out last fall, but the timeline has since been stretched out to later this year. Part of the delay, Montoya said, was the departure of former team leader Sabrina Stadler, who

left in August.

Stadler died on Sept. 7, 2016, due to complications with pancreatitis. Michael Hampton, a retired Forest Service employee, filled the role of team leader on an interim basis until Anne arrived on the job in mid-December.

The team also recently brought on a new fisheries biologist to lead consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on complying with the federal Endangered Species Act — primarily for Snake River salmon, steelhead and bull trout.

"We've been trying our best to temporarily fill some of those gaps," Montoya said.

Though the Blue Mountains Forest Plan is being studied under one umbrella, each of the three forests will have its own individual plan. The final decision will come down to Regional Forester Jim Peña in the Forest Service's Portland headquarters.

Montoya said the two new alternatives could more than double the pace of restoration being done on the forests. The question is how and where that restoration will be addressed.

"We're trying to make sure we're being responsive as much as possible, meeting with folks who want to help us with this," Montoya said.

FIREFIGHTERS: Fires burned 30,630 acres across northeast Oregon in 2016

Continued from 1A

Traci Weaver, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Forest Service regional office in Portland, said their agency is exempt from the hiring freeze on both seasonal and permanent firefighting staff. The Forest Service is moving forward with hiring, Weaver said, and they expect to have their usual number of firefighters on hand.

However, Wyden said he has not received the same assurance from the BLM. Both agencies have firefighting responsibilities, but are housed under different federal departments — the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture and the BLM in the Department of the Interior.

"When looking for clarification, my staff has had multiple and somewhat conflicting responses to verbal inquiries with your agency," Wyden wrote in his letter to acting Interior Secretary Haugrud. "I would appreciate a swift response that includes the plans for hiring these much-needed positions."

A spokesman for Wyden said the office had not heard

back from Haugrud as of Tuesday.

Randy Eardley, a spokesman for the BLM positioned at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, said they are still awaiting guidance from up the chain of command, and while there are conversations happening consistently, he couldn't provide any other details.

A total of 136 fires burned 30,630 acres across northeast Oregon in 2016, according to the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center. That includes local Forest Service and BLM land, in addition to state and tribal land. About 90 seasonal firefighters participated in last year's Northeast Oregon Fire School, which included first-year firefighters from the Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and state Department of Forestry.

President Trump has tabbed Montana state congressman Ryan Zinke to lead the Department of the Interior, and former Georgia governor Sonny Perdue for agriculture secretary. Neither of those cabinet picks has been confirmed yet by Congress.

SMOKE: Biomass expected to burn for at least a few more days

Continued from 1A

and bruises to more serious trauma, Zellars said, though he did not give further details.

An air ambulance was called, but couldn't respond because of the foggy conditions.

Oregon State Police reported four of the injured were in a Chrysler Town & Country that slammed into the rear of a semitrailer. The driver could not see through the dense fog and smoke, according to state police. The 32-year-old man from Pocatello, Idaho, and his wife, 33, and their two children, a boy, 12, and a girl, 10, all suffered serious injuries.

They all went to the Hermiston hospital, where ambulances took the children to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, Portland.

The family's dog, a Chihuahua and bulldog mix, ran from the crash and remains missing.

The smoke, pushed down by a weather inver-

sion, mixed with fog and left visibility at nearly zero. Two semi-trailers also collided in the westbound lane at about the same time, but there were no injuries and the drivers were able to clear the wreck themselves.

Zellars said smoke and fog continue to obscure the road Tuesday morning. Rice said the biomass is expected to burn for at least a few more days.

"We're dealing with it as fast as we can," he said.

Marty Broadbent, Boardman fire marshal, said wood chips were removed from the main fire and spread out into two smaller piles so the material could burn more quickly. The fire department has ordered GreenWood Resources to douse those two smaller piles, Broadbent said, to reduce the amount of smoke over the highway.

Spontaneous combustion can happen in large hay and wood piles, as the tightly packed material generates heat that mixes with oxygen and bursts into flames.