

## HERMISTON

# Holiday Inn opens all four floors

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian

Hermiston can welcome more visitors with the opening of the new Holiday Inn Express.

The city's newest hotel, located at 245 N. First St. in Hermiston, celebrated its grand opening Friday with a ribbon-cutting and tours of rooms on each of its four floors.

The hotel has 93 rooms, 18 suites and amenities including a pool, meeting rooms, fitness center and complimentary breakfast. It had its soft opening Dec. 7, opening the top floor for guests while the rest of the hotel was finished.

The hotel is now the tallest building in Hermiston, and in the city's urban renewal district. It is expected to increase revenue to other businesses in the downtown area.

Steven Arrasmith, the hotel's general manager, said the building took almost a year to construct. He said the company chose to come to Hermiston because they wanted to be a part of the vitality of a growing place.

"We wanted to be a part of the growth and up-and-coming success," Arrasmith said.

He said business has been good since the soft opening.

Arrasmith said most of the



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

Locals and members of the Holiday Inn staff celebrate the opening of Hermiston's newest hotel on Friday with a ribbon-cutting.

employees — there are currently 35 — are from Hermiston. He said he expects they will hire more as the business starts to grow, and offer the jobs to locals first.

Richard Boyles, the president of InnSight Hotel Management

Group, which owns the hotel, said he was excited to provide this service to Hermiston.

"We saw a market that was underserved in terms of this quality of product," he said. "We aim to deliver a higher level of service."

Holiday Inn staff said roughly 150 people attended the open house over the two-hour period.

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## Economic development region proposed for Malheur

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — What can a collapsed onion shed tell you about Malheur County's economy?

It may illustrate the tough competition the border county faces with southwestern Idaho, a problem that two legislators are trying to address with a proposed economic development region.

Heavy snow hit the southeastern region of Oregon hard earlier this winter, resulting in the collapse of key buildings, including storage sheds for one of the area's signature crops.

Some onion purveyors have already taken their insurance money and set up shop in Idaho, where certain policies can make enterprise more attractive, according to Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario.

The far flung county often plays economic second fiddle to southwestern Idaho, unlike other small communities in Eastern Oregon that are a greater distance from the Gem State's border. Certain Oregon policies, such as a higher minimum wage and restrictions on land use planning, can put the county at a

competitive disadvantage.

A new proposal, first read Thursday in the Oregon House and sponsored by Bentz and Oregon Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, D-Portland, is a gesture to rural Oregon. It was in the works before the snow hit, but has taken on new significance in the wake of the storms, Kotek said.

"We're saying to (Malheur County) that we care and we want businesses to stay in Ontario," Kotek said.

The proposal would dedicate \$10 million in proceeds from lottery bonds in the next two-year budget cycle for a new economic development region in the cities of Ontario, Vale, Nyssa and surrounding areas.

Bentz was adamant that it's early yet for the proposal, though. He has introduced another bill to defer minimum wage increases in Malheur and Baker counties for two years, and says he wants to attract more higher-wage jobs to the area through economic development.

Bentz said the county is doing better than it has in some time in terms of unemployment.

The recession hit the county

hard, reaching a high of 14 percent unemployment in April 2009, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Poverty rates between 1995 and 2015 in southeastern Oregon exceeded state and national rates in that period, according to Oregon's economic analysis office. Generally, economic recoveries of the kind the state is seeing now — especially in the Portland Metro region and in the Bend area — take a while to reach rural Oregon.

The proposed economic development region would be led by a local board that would make policy and award grants and loans to entities such as businesses, school districts and local governments. The seven-member board would be appointed by the governor.

Kotek said she was influenced by a three-day trip she took to the area in June 2016, at the invitation of Bentz, and acknowledged the perceived distance — not just geographic — between Malheur County and policymaking in Salem. She thinks the proposal can show the area the Legislature is "serious" about promoting the county's success.

## BRIEFLY

### Nominations open for admin assistant award

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce is seeking nominations for the administrative professional of the year.

People are encouraged to nominate their administrative assistant to be recognized during a special Administrative Professionals Day Luncheon. The event is Tuesday, April 25 at 11:45 a.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. Tickets are \$20 each or a table of eight for \$140. In addition to all nominees being recognized, lunch and giveaways, comedienne Susan Rice will provide entertainment.

Nominations are due by Friday, April 14. For more information, a nomination form or tickets, contact 541-567-6151, [info@hermistonchamber.com](mailto:info@hermistonchamber.com) or visit [www.hermistonchamber.com](http://www.hermistonchamber.com).

### Workforce board offers help

LA GRANDE — Money is available to manufacturing and health care companies in several Eastern Oregon counties to assist with retraining current employees.

Available in Umatilla, Morrow, Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Union and Wallowa counties, the Eastern Oregon Workforce Board has dedicated \$40,000 through the Incumbent Worker Training Program. This could include training in new or advanced skills that enable an employee to multi-task or be more productive.

At this time, the program is limited to businesses in the manufacturing or health care sectors. Priority for funding is given to applicants who demonstrate that funding could assist them in avoiding a layoff, downsizing or closure, or would provide retention opportunities by upgrading employee skills as a result of the training.

For more information, call Tara Bishop at 541-278-5688 (Umatilla/Morrow counties) or Eric LaBonte at 541-963-7942 (other counties listed). For more about the Eastern Oregon Workforce Board, visit [www.eowb.org](http://www.eowb.org).

### Latino Business Network hosts resource fair

HERMISTON — An informational forum to connect people to employers and services in our region is planned in Hermiston.

The Latino Business Network is hosting the Community Agricultural Workers and Employers Resource Fair. The free event is Wednesday, March 8 from 5-7:30 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. A free dinner will be served by Fiesta Foods.

Vendor applications are available at the conference center or [www.hermistonchamber.com](http://www.hermistonchamber.com). For more information about the Latino Business Network or the upcoming resource fair, call the chamber at 541-567-6151.

### Yakama tribal casino opens 200-room hotel

TOPPENISH, Wash. (AP) — The Yakama Nation is opening a 200-room hotel at its Legends Casino near the town of Toppenish.

The Yakima Herald-Republic says the hotel opens to the public on Saturday.

It's a central part of a \$90 million expansion for Legends Casino, which seeks to stay competitive with other tribal-owned casinos throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The expansion is expected to generate 200 new jobs for the casino, which opened in 1998. Currently, it employs 745 workers.

John Cooper, CEO of Yakima Valley Tourism, says the hotel adds an upscale option to the lodging mix in the central Yakima Valley.



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