

PENDLETON

Downtown occupancy falls slightly as large properties remain vacant

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Following a strong flow of businesses on South Main Street and in the Pendleton downtown area, the occupancy rate is starting to ebb again.

Although the overall statistics showed that downtown space is still overwhelmingly occupied, an occupancy survey conducted in February showed some decreases.

According to Charles Denight, associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, 84 percent of Main Street was occupied, down from the 91 percent occupancy rate recorded in an August 2017 survey.

The downtown area between Southeast Third Street and Southwest Third Street was essentially flat — 87 percent in February versus 86 percent in August. Expanded further to the area between Sixth and Sixth, and occupancy has fallen from 89 percent to 85 percent.

While most downtown spaces are filled, and don't stay vacant for long when they aren't, there are a few larger properties that have stayed stubbornly empty.

J.C. Penney anchored Main Street for 106 years before it closed up shop last July.

The La Grande-based Jager Properties owns the building that housed J.C. Penney, and although it hasn't been occupied in an almost a year, Jager co-owner Gary Vaughn said he's confident they'll eventually get it filled.

Vaughn said the space is currently in the midst of a renovation and will get new lights, ceiling, and heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

Department stores have largely abandoned rural communities, and Vaughn said the retail industry is being hit hard across the U.S.

But he's working with Pendleton economic development director Steve Chrisman to market the property, and he thinks a retail tenant will fill the spot like the rest of his downtown properties.

On the next block south, the old bank on 256 S. Main St. has been empty for a lot longer. With a few short-lived exceptions, the building has been vacant for decades.

Harsch Investment Properties, a real estate company owned by wealthy art collec-

tor Jordan Schnitzer, bought the property in 2016 and marketed it for lease, but it remains unfilled.

Harsch did not provide a comment as of press time.

Just off Main Street, the old Pendleton Cinema at 415 S.W. First Street hasn't changed much from the day it closed.

The marquee still reads "That's all folks. 1981 to 2015" and movie posters from 2015 — "The Sponge-Bob Movie: Sponge Out of Water" and "The Divergent Series: Insurgent" still plaster one of the doors.

Goodwill Industries of the Columbia bought the theater in 2015 with the idea of turning it into a thrift store, before the organization changed its mind and put it back on the market.

Goodwill placed a collection trailer in the parking lot, but that's comprised most of the visible activity on the property.

Joey Edminster, the marketing and communication specialist for Goodwill Industries of the Columbia, did not return a request for comment.

Denight, the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, said he's toured through each

property and provides information to anyone interested in finding a building for their business.

While all three properties might make for good retail stores, Denight said retail is largely dependent on having a local population large enough to support it.

In the longterm, Denight said the city's efforts to increase housing supply could make these properties more desirable to the retail industry.

"It's an evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary process because it doesn't happen overnight," he said.

But Denight doesn't want the city resting on its laurels either, referencing a shopper's survey the development commission recently conducted to get an idea of where locals shop and what kind of businesses they would like to see in the downtown area.

Denight said the survey results will be released next month, with plans to provide the data to prospective businesses as evidence that there's demand.

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

BRIEFLY

Murray's opens pharmacy in Boardman

BOARDMAN — Murray's Drug recently held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of its Boardman pharmacy.

A third generation family-owned pharmacy, Murray's also has locations in Heppner and Condon. Murray's Drug Boardman Pharmacy is located at 101 S.W. Kinkade Road. It's open Monday through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., except from 1-1:30 p.m. In addition, it has a drive-through window for customer convenience. For more information, call 541-481-9474.

Business enhancement grants available

HEPPNER — Businesses in south Morrow County communities are eligible to apply for grant funding through the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group.

The Business Enhancement Grants provide assistance with outside/exterior improvements. Those requesting funding must have commitments for at least 50 percent needed for the total project budget prior to applying — it may include in-kind and cash contributions from local and regional sources. At the discretion of the board, some exceptions may be allowed.

The grant application is due Friday, July 6. For more information or to obtain a grant application form and an eligibility and exclusions information sheet, contact Sheryll Bates at 541-676-5536 or heppnerchamber@centurytel.net. Also, forms are available at city hall offices in Heppner, Ione and Lexington.

Buttercreek Boys perform old-time favorites

HERMISTON — People are invited to tap their toes and sing along as the Buttercreek Boys tune up their instruments.

Old-time music will fill the air Wednesday, June 13 from 6-7:30 p.m. at the Chuckwagon Cafe, 81027 N. Highway 395, Hermiston. There is no cover charge. Although food purchases are not required, Cathy Stolz and her crew will be whipping up some Italian specials.

The seasoned musicians, who are in their 60s and beyond, include Curt Claughton (stand-up bass, fiddle), Lou Reeves (guitar), Win Weston (guitar), Jim Simpson (banjo, harmonica) and Rusty Roe (saxophone).

For information, contact 541-567-6329 or chuckwagon395@gmail.com.

Celebrating resilience with barbecue, sidewalk sales

HEPPNER — The annual community barbecue hosted by the Heppner branch of the Bank of Eastern Oregon is coming up.

Food will be served hot of the grill Friday, June 15 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. outside the bank at 279 N. Main St. In addition, local businesses are hosting sidewalk sales from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The event is traditionally held near the anniversary date of the June 14, 1903 flood. The disaster claimed hundreds of lives and wiped out much of the business district and washed away homes, but the survivors rallied with amazing spirit to carry on.

For more information, call the Heppner chamber at 541-676-5536.

WOOD: Might restart the the rural timber economy

Continued from 1A

after an earthquake — it survives the earthquake," Heppner said.

The construction advantages mass timber offers, he said, might restart the timber economy in rural Oregon.

The state already is making investments in mass timber with the Tallwood Design Institute at the University of Oregon. Judith Sheine is the director of the institute and

said mass timber is pushing the creation of jobs, better forest management and even fighting global warming.

The institute works on certificate programs in mass timber construction and work force development, Sheine said. It helps local governments create wood structures, such as the Springfield Mass Timber Parking Garage.

The university planned to use steel to improve the west grandstands at Hayward Field,

but the institute convinced the project to go with wood. And Lane County is considering a mass timber courthouse, she said, with all the source material available within a 250-mile radius.

Oregon's U.S. senators also are pushing to the development of mass timber.

Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, submitted a bipartisan letter on May 23 urging the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and

Forestry to include the Timber Innovation Act in the next Farm Bill.

The act would help the mass timber industry on multiple fronts, from a new research and development program for using mass timber products in construction to grants to incentivize new wood technology for construction. The act also would extend the Tall Wood Building Prize Competition for the five years. Framework is a previous winner.

Trump barrels into G-7 summit, ready to fight U.S. allies

Associated Press

LA MALBAIE, Quebec (AP) — Bruising for a fight, President Donald Trump barreled into the Group of Seven summit Friday, confronting longtime U.S. allies over a burgeoning trade dispute and insisting Russia should be brought back into the fold.

Trump joined the leaders of major industrialized nations in an idyllic Canadian resort town after days of escalating conflict over new U.S. tariffs he slapped on imports of steel and aluminum. Facing pointed criticism from increasingly disillusioned allies, he punched back, uncowed by the growing global outcry.

"Look, all of these countries have been taking advantage of the United States on trade," Trump told reporters as he left the White House, repeating his longstanding complaints about trade deficits and tariffs. He declared: "We have to straighten it out."

However, Trump did seek to lower the temperature after his arrival. He bantered easily with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, joking that the neighboring leader had "agreed to cut all tariffs and all trade bar-



AP Photo/Evan Vuoci

U.S. President Donald Trump shakes hands with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a meeting at the G-7 summit, Friday in Charlevoix, Canada.

riers." And he emphasized a "good relationship" with French President Emmanuel Macron, saying they sometimes have a "little test" on trade, but predicting a positive outcome.

Still, the fundamental differences remained clear. Trump again railed against trade deficits with other countries and repeated that he may pursue separate negotiations with Canada and Mexico to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Asked if Trudeau was upset he'd be leaving Canada early, Trump joked, "He's happy."

Macron said there had

been "open and direct" discussions, adding that he thought there was a way to get a "win-win" outcome on trade, though details remained unclear.

Before arriving at the meeting of the group, which some suggest Trump is pushing from the Group of Seven into "G-6 plus one," he further stirred the pot by asking why Russia was excluded.

"They should let Russia come back in because we should have Russia at the negotiating table," he said.

Russia was ousted from the elite group in 2014 as punishment for President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea and support for

pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. In the U.S., special counsel Robert Mueller is investigating whether Trump's campaign colluded with Russia in a bid to sway the 2016 presidential election in his favor.

Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said the Russia issue "hasn't been raised around the G-7 table," though she said there have been "some direct conversations in bilateral meetings." She added "there are no grounds whatsoever for bringing Russia with its current behavior back into the G-7."

Despite the tension, the president was greeted cordially by Trudeau as he arrived at the annual gathering, held this year at a picturesque Quebec resort. Other members of the Group of Seven are France, Italy, Japan, Germany and Britain.

The European Union also attends.

Over the course of his presidency, Trump has inflamed allies with his isolationist policies, including withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris climate accord and the international Iran nuclear agreement. Under Trump, the United States has abandoned its traditional role in the G-7 as an advocate for freer global trade, instead pushing more protectionist policies.

"The rules-based international order is being challenged, not by the usual suspects but by its main architect and guarantor: the United States," said European Council President Donald Tusk.

Relations have hit such a low point that a key question now is whether the seven countries can agree on a joint statement of pri-

orities at the conclusion of the meeting. Macron said Thursday on Twitter, "The American President may not mind being isolated, but neither do we mind signing a 6 country agreement if need be." Trump said he thinks the group will produce a joint statement.

In the days leading up to the summit, Trudeau and Macron have severely criticized Trump's new tariffs, which critics say threaten to drive up prices for American consumers and companies and heighten uncertainty for businesses and investors around the globe.

But Trump, who frames his trade moves as a fulfillment of his campaign promises, is vowing to hold firm, tweeting Thursday: "Take down your tariffs & barriers or we will more than match you!"

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