



Staff photo by Jade McDowell, File

Racks of clothing stretch down an aisle of Ranch & Home in Hermiston during the first day of its soft opening earlier this year.

Businesses consider more than size when choosing a location

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — From Red Robin to Costco, everyone has a wish list of restaurants or stores they wish were closer.

Those businesses have their own lists of what they need in a new location, however, and some communities don't measure up. A city might have too few people, too much competition, not enough local spending, too low of a median income or be too far away from an interstate.

Companies today are able to analyze exactly what makes for a successful location and what each community has to offer, Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said.

"There are companies out there that know more about Hermiston than we do as far as the market," he said.

Companies can go beyond looking at the number of people living in a market, for example, and see how many locals are actually shopping there. Consultants like Retail Coach put together analyses by using cellphone location data from the many apps that make their money by quietly tracking users' location and selling the information.

"Your cellphone knows where you live because it knows where you sleep at night," Morgan said.

From there, a company can analyze how many Hermiston residents are shopping or eating in the Tri-Cities, or create a "heat map" of sorts showing

where visitors to a certain Hermiston store are coming from.

"If you really want to help drive additional resources to Hermiston, spend more of your money in Hermiston," Morgan said.

Most businesses the *East Oregonian* contacted to ask about what they look for in a new location didn't respond.

Olive Garden did send over a list of its site selection criteria. The requirements include a trade area of at least 100,000 people within a 15-minute drive (Hermiston's ZIP code held 50,415 in 2016) and a property of at least 2 acres with at least 20,000 average daily trips past it (Hermiston's busiest intersection at Highway 395 and Elm Avenue sees 22,000 vehicles per day). Other restaurants owned by the chain's parent company Darden require as high as 30,000 to 50,000 average daily trips.

Some chains set their sights lower. According to Golden Corral's website, their smallest restaurant model is made for sites with 21,500 average daily trips, 45,000 people within a 15-minute drive and 70,000 people within a 20-minute drive.

Costco, which has been the subject of rumor in many cities in Eastern Oregon and Washington, declined to comment on its site selection practices. Documents on a few websites, including a flier on the Gallelli Real Estate website, indicate Costco is looking for sites with 200,000 people within a 5-mile radius and a median

income of \$75,000. Hermiston's median income was \$49,559 in 2016.

Of course, there are older Costcos that don't fit that rule — the smallest Costco is located in Juneau, Alaska, population 32,164. But many brick and mortar retailers are also expanding more cautiously now that they have to compete with online retailers.

Not everyone considers Hermiston too small — Panda Express just announced it is building a new restaurant in the former Stockman's Steakhouse location. Hermiston has also welcomed new retail in the past five years, including Ranch & Home, Harbor Freight and Petsense.

The community has also seen the addition of locally owned restaurants such as Delish Bistro and Veg Out. Morgan said the city provides a treasure trove of market data on its website to assist entrepreneurs who may not have the resources to conduct their own market analysis.

Morgan said people tend to be willing to drive further for some things than others, which is why different businesses may be looking at differently sized "trade areas."

"Something like 7-Eleven is going to have a very different drive time people are willing to do versus something like Home Depot," he said.

It also makes a difference how many competitors are already there — Morgan said when people ask why The Dalles has a Fred Meyer even though it's smaller than Hermiston, he points out The Dalles already offers many of the same goods.

He said the city's approach to recruiting restaurants and retail is generally to "set the table" for them with good infrastructure and fewer hurdles. Hermiston, unlike most cities, does not require a business license with the exception of food trucks.

Condon Times-Journal sold to new local owner

By ALEX CASTLE
East Oregonian

CONDON — The *Condon Times-Journal* is changing local hands after Steven and Renee Allen purchased the newspaper on July 1 from McLauren Stinchfield of Macro Graphics Condon.

Stinchfield owned, published, and edited the paper for the last 45 years.

"I don't really know what to think of it yet. I'm not sure of how to think of there not being anymore deadlines," Stinchfield said. "It's been a great 45 years and has been an honor and a privilege to publish in my hometown."

The small town located in Gilliam County has relied on the weekly paper for local journalism since 1886, and the now-former owner doesn't want that to stop.

"It just has to continue, and it will," Stinchfield said and highlighted that the married couple are young and ready to take over.

Steven Allen, 40, said that he and his wife Renee, 38, are family friends with the Stinchfields and that they've been leaning on their "institutional knowledge" of the business and community.

"We're really fortunate to have them as mentors," Steven said.

When asked, Steven declined to comment on or disclose the purchase price of the paper.

Prior to the purchase, Steven has worked on community development projects and nonprofits in the area, while Renee is a graphic designer and web developer. When asked why they purchased the paper, Steven pointed to his family and his deep roots to the region.

Steven's grandmother was a first generation immigrant from Scotland and grew up in Condon, where she ultimately graduated from the local high school in 1954.

Steven grew up in the surrounding areas and said he and his wife are ready to take on the responsibility as the town's source for local news.

"It felt like time to come home," Steven said. "We want to play a role in serving, helping and developing our community."

The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association lists the paper's circulation as 1,306.

Along with their watchdog role in the community, Steven added that he wanted to help the area technologically adapt to the changes of today. And with Renee's specializations, they hope to help local businesses increase and improve their online presence.

BRIEFLY

County jail getting full body scanner

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Jail staff are getting a new tool to prevent people from smuggling in contraband.

The county board of commissioners Wednesday approved the purchase of a \$173,000 full-body scanner for the jail. Sheriff's Capt. Thoren Hearn oversees the jail and explained to the board at its public meeting the need for device.

During the past year, he said, the jail has had at least six instances where someone was able to bring in and use drugs, even after strip searches, including a female who overdosed on fentanyl two out of her last three stays. The full body scanner, he said, would detect such contraband.

The \$172,800 price includes training on the device and a five-year warranty. Command Sourcing Inc. of Loomis, California, is supplying the scanner, and the county is buying through a partnership with Clackamas County.

Hearn also told the board the jail received more revenue than the sheriff's office expected, and that money can cover the cost of the scanner.



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