

Tough road: ‘This was the final cherry on the cupcake for me’

Continued from Page A1

“That does help a huge amount,” she said.

Bookstores weren’t specified by name in Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order of March 23 shutting down nonessential businesses, but the Gormleys closed along with neighboring stores on Main Street selling furniture, jewelry and other goods that were named in the order. Gormley said they felt that they fit within the spirit of the order for people to only leave their house for essential reasons, they didn’t want to aid in the spread of COVID-19, and she and her husband fall into a senior age category that put them at additional risk.

She said they are lucky to have retirement money to live on, “but as far as the business goes, there’s nothing to pay the insurance and utilities and rent.”

They’ll put their personal stimulus checks into the business to supplement

UMATILLA COUNTY AWARDS GRANTS

Umatilla County has awarded the grants that were available to small businesses affected by COVID-19. Businesses with fewer than 26 employees were eligible for the \$1,000 grants. The county announced Friday that 22 businesses in Hermiston, 19 businesses in Pendleton, 10 businesses in Milton-Freewater, seven businesses in Umatilla and seven businesses in other smaller communities received money from the program.

The number of grants awarded in each city was based on population, and then those spots in each city were awarded by lottery draw. According to the county, a total of 137 businesses applied.

The county news release also stated that the city of Hermiston contributed additional

funds to help cover Hermiston businesses that were not drawn for the county grant. That allowed an additional 16 Hermiston businesses to receive a grant.

Gail Nelson, economic development director for the county, said the funds were meant to help fill in gaps between state and federal funds that could assist businesses with rent and other necessities.

For assistance applying to the federal Paycheck Protection Program or Economic Disaster Injury Loan, call the Umatilla Electric Cooperative Business Resource Center in Hermiston at 541-289-3000 or the Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center at 541-278-5833 in Pendleton.

whatever isn’t covered by the county’s \$1,000 grant, including safety upgrades to reduce contact with customers during transactions when they reopen sometime in the future.

“We’re covering that on our own, but we feel it’s worth it,” she said.

Bonnie and Glenn Greiner

have been doing a little bit of work for their upholstery side business at home, but their retail shop, Wild Goose Design in Hermiston, had to close its doors under the March 23 executive order.

Bonnie said she has been posting pictures of items to the Wild Goose Design social media pages, along

with a phone number people can call for delivery or curbside pickup, but so far they’ve only sold two items that way.

“I’ve been posting on Facebook and Instagram, but I don’t have a big following, and when you don’t have money it’s hard to buy ads on TV or radio or in the paper,”

she said.

She said it’s been “really kind of a challenge” trying to find grants that business owners without employees can apply for to cover a shop’s rent and other costs that still pile up even with the doors closed. Self-employment can also make it difficult for people to qualify for benefits, such as unemployment and health insurance.

Still, she said she was optimistic that “this too shall pass,” and she wouldn’t want to say that her situation was worse than anyone else’s.

“I know it’s a challenge for everyone,” she said. “Everyone’s having to deal with something. I’m glad I don’t have small children at home.”

Not all small businesses will survive the challenges presented by COVID-19. Cynthia Traner, who runs Her Shabby Shed in Hermiston, said the vintage shop is done for good.

“This was the final cherry on the cupcake for me,”

she said. “I’m not opening again.”

She said she hadn’t been making enough money from the business to draw a paycheck before the pandemic hit, and she knew she wasn’t going to be a good candidate for loans and other help for the business in that situation. She still has plenty of inventory left over that she hopes to take on the road at some point in the future once big vendor shows like Junk Barn Girls start happening again.

Traner said it was frustrating to see entire families crowding into large stores like Walmart, and yet the hair stylist across the street who serves one customer at a time is ordered to close.

“I see it both ways,” she said. “My heart really aches for people who have lost loved ones, and my heart goes out to first responders and hospital workers on the front lines, but it seems (the government) could do something to let these little mom and pop shops reopen.”

Budget crisis: Reduction in state funding could have devastating consequences

Continued from Page A1

public colleges. But half of the money going to each school is required to help students, rather than bailing out university and college budgets.

“Every institution is facing some really difficult, really choppy water financially — and that’s true even with the benefit and support of the CARES Act,” HECC Executive Director Ben Cannon said.

So universities are making some tough choices to mitigate those costs.

Most universities have canceled travel. Some universities have implemented a hiring freeze or pay cuts for employees. Citing a projected loss of \$25 million, University of Oregon announced

layoffs for 282 employees.

Oregon’s smaller institutions could be in an even tighter financial spot than their larger peers.

But in some ways, they have been more prepared to move to remote learning.

As a rural university, La Grande’s Eastern Oregon University has a robust online program — President Tom Insko said 50% of students were already online before the pandemic. But going completely remote costs money — money universities may not have the flexibility to spend.

“Public universities don’t operate with margin — we essentially have budgets that are designed to provide the services to students that are desperately needed,” said

Insko, who also recently took over as chair of the Oregon Council of Presidents.

“We do have fund balances, but they’re extremely minimal.”

That means any large changes in enrollment or state funding hit a university’s bottom line — one that was already compromised by trends felt in higher education nationally — from lower enrollment to less funding.

In addition to additional costs and reduced income from student contributions, coronavirus-related financial losses at the state level could lead legislators to cut funding to universities.

“If we see cutbacks in state funding for any of our institutions, it will be rather devastating,” Insko said.

In addition to CARES Act funding, the governor also has \$32.5 million from the Emergency Education Relief Fund to split between higher education and public schools.

But those funds won’t be enough to keep Oregon’s universities financially stable — officials say it’ll take further changes.

“That’s why we will see additional furloughs, hiring freezes, pay reductions, and layoffs across many of our institutions,” said Cannon.

Insko says EOU is in a “pretty decent financial position” for the short term.

Both EOU and Portland State have told employees no jobs would be cut this term.

Portland State’s Board of Trustees recently voted to use reserves to help cover some of

the university’s losses related to COVID-19. The university said additional cost-saving measures will likely be announced later this spring.

And for many of Oregon’s colleges, COVID-19 exacerbates problems for institutions that were already under significant stress before.

Last year, University of Oregon reported decreasing numbers of international students. In his message announcing layoffs, UO President Michael Schill said it’s possible the university will face an enrollment decline in the fall.

“We will need flexibility to preserve the institution’s long-term viability,” Schill said.

Southern Oregon University in Ashland had already been cutting costs this aca-

demical year. At a meeting this week of SOU’s Board Finance and Administration Committee, Vice President for Finance and Administration Greg Perkinson outlined the financial impact of COVID-19.

“We talk about flattening the COVID-19 cost-curve — we’ve got some SOU cost-curve flattening to do,” Perkinson said during the meeting.

Factoring in the \$1.7 million SOU will directly receive from the CARES Act, the university still needs \$2.8 million in the short term. But as the virus continues, long-term impacts to universities could be much worse.

“We’ll need more help as we work through this pandemic,” Perkinson said.

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6	3			9	4			
1							9	6
	6	3			2			5
8				4				2
5			3			9	7	
4	5							3
			4	3			5	9
		7	6		5	2		4

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