

County creates application for CARES funds

Struggling businesses can now apply for financial support from state funds

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Umatilla County businesses can now apply to receive economic support from the state-funded CARES Act, which provided the county with up to \$1.18 million in funds to be distributed to businesses that have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Businesses can apply for support until Dec. 15 on Umatilla County's website. The county "encourages applications from veterans, women, Black, indigenous, people of color, and tribal-owned businesses."

Businesses that will receive priority in receiving financial support will include those in the hospitality industry, such as restaurants, bars, wineries, breweries, hotels and motels. Other priority businesses will include those which had to shut down due to the two-week "freeze" initiated by Gov. Kate Brown, including fitness and entertainment establishments like gyms, theaters, bowling alleys and museums.

The amount of money that a business will receive will vary depending on the type of business and the economic impact COVID-

19 has had. And businesses hoping to receive funds must meet a variety of requirements.

The business must be headquartered and operate in the county, be required by law to be registered with the Oregon Secretary of State and be for-profit or tax-exempt under section 501 (c) 3 of the internal revenue code.

The business must also have also been either prohibited from operating under the two-week freeze initiated by Gov. Kate Brown, or show the pandemic caused a 25% decline in sales between March 1 and Nov. 30 in comparison to 2019.

The business must also employ 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees.

Certain companies will be ineligible to receive support. These include passive real estate holding companies, nonprofits that are not tax-exempt and businesses that have experienced a non-COVID-related decline in sales.

Businesses that are delinquent on taxes due on or before the date of the application will also be ineligible, as will those that do not comply with federal, state and local laws.

Businesses that have closed and do not intend to reopen, and "adult-oriented businesses that derive a majority of income from gambling activities," will also be ineligible to receive support.

The county intends to have the checks in the mail by Dec. 30.

Holiday bazaar moves outdoors



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Shoppers wander the city of Hermiston's holiday bazaar in the parking lot of the Hermiston Community Center on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020. The annual event was moved outdoors due to COVID-19 concerns.

Club 24 closes at request of OSHA

Gyms initially said they were staying open as 'wellness centers'

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Club 24's Oregon locations and the Hermiston Athletic Club are closed at the request of Oregon's Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

The locations, where people sign up for a monthly membership in exchange for use of workout equipment, fitness classes and other exercise, initially stated they were staying open as "wellness centers" after Gov. Kate Brown initially ordered gyms and fitness centers to close as part of the state's latest COVID-19 restrictions. But on Nov. 30, Club 24's Oregon locations and Hermiston Athletic Club posted identical messages to their Facebook pages, stating they would close effective immediately "as per Oregon OSHA."

The message stated that member accounts would be frozen and staff would be furloughed during the holidays as a result.

In response to a public records request from the *East Oregonian*, OSHA responded that there had not been fines or other official enforcement actions



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Vehicles were parked at the Club 24 location in Hermiston on Nov. 22, 2020, before the location shut down a few days later at the request of OSHA.

taken against the businesses because the owner had voluntarily complied with shutting down after being contacted by OSHA.

Customers reacted with disappointment on social media at the announcement. In an email to the *EO*, Hermiston Club 24 member Chris Waive said he joined Club 24 about 15 years ago after exiting the military. His membership helped him transition back into civilian life and work through physical injuries he suffered as a result of his service, he said.

"Over these years, I came to understand many members suffer from past physical injury," he said. "It would not be untrue to

say that a large majority of people go because motion begets motion. Over the years, we've motivated each other and offered words of encouragement as we struggle to find balance in pain management through fitness.

"In other words, the state views these facilities as recreational. They failed to realize these facilities provide a place and equipment for those of us who graduate from out patient physical therapy. These facilities are as much a necessity as any outpatient physical therapy clinic. Let's not forget also the mental benefit of physical fitness."

In an emailed statement,

Club 24 said they complied with OSHA's request in order to avoid "crippling fines" as they appeal OSHA's decision.

"We are confident that we are meeting, if not surpassing, the safety measures of clubs in this study and look forward to working with OSHA and the State of Oregon on safely and responsibly operating our business that so many Oregonians are dependent upon for their physical and mental health," the statement said, adding they appreciate members who have offered to keep paying their dues in order to support the employees being furloughed.

Dollar General is considering store in Umatilla

City's planning commission reviewed and approved site plan for proposed store

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Dollar General could be coming to Umatilla.

Dollar General spokesperson Angela Petkovic said in an email that the company is still in the "due diligence" phase and has not made a final commitment yet.

The national chain of variety stores has been working with the city's planning commission, however, and meeting minutes from the commission's Oct. 27 meeting shows the committee has reviewed a site plan for the possible store and unanimously approved a plat for Dollar General to combine five tax lots into one. At that meeting, the minutes state, a representative from the company described Umatilla as a "great regional location" for a store.

Petkovic said the company anticipates making a final decision by summer 2021.

"Our customers are at the center of all that we do, and meeting customers' needs is Dollar General's top priority when choosing store locations," she wrote. "In selecting store sites, we take a number of factors into consideration, carefully evaluating each potential new store location to ensure we can continue to meet our customers' price, value and selection needs. We further strive to provide convenience for customers who may not have affordable nearby retail options."

The approximately 7,500-square-foot store would be located at the corner of Sixth Street and Yerxa Avenue, according to information submitted to the planning commission, and Petkovic said it would employ six to 10 people.

Dollar General sells food, household goods, health and beauty items, seasonal decorations and other merchandise. Not to be confused with Dollar Tree, the store's prices vary by item. According to information provided by the store, it offers grants each year to schools, libraries and nonprofits within a 15-mile radius of its stores and distribution centers.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Law enforcement to crack down on intoxicated drivers

UMATILLA COUNTY — The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office has announced that it will be increasing the number of deputies on patrol this holiday season in an effort to crack down on and discourage drunken drivers, according to a press release Monday, Dec. 7.

The effort is part of Oregon's DUI/High Visibil-

ity Enforcement grants program, which funds law enforcement to increase the number of officers on the street aggressively seeking out impaired drivers.

The department is asking for community assistance by requesting that the public call in and report suspected intoxicated drivers.

"Agencies will continue to work hard to keep our streets safe during this holiday season," the press release said.

The event will run from Dec. 16, 2020, through Jan. 2, 2021.

Inmate dies on hospice care at TRCI

UMATILLA — A 68-year-old man incarcerated at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla died while on hospice care on Saturday, Dec. 5, according to a press release from the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Michael Gene Thomas died at the prison after being incarcerated in June 2003 from Lane County, the release stated. His earliest release date was May 5, 2022.

Per standard protocol, the Oregon State Police have been notified of the death. — *EO Media Group*



Thomas

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