

Dining: Chamber of commerce lends outdoor heaters

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that they feel unfairly targeted compared to other businesses. In November, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association and the Restaurant Law Center filed a joint complaint in federal court for injunctive relief from two-week freeze that lasted from Nov. 18 to Dec. 3.

Some local governments have tried to help ease the burden. In Hermiston, the city is offering downtown restaurants the use of its parking lots for outdoor seating, and donated \$15,000 to the Hermiston Downtown District to help with seating and other items needed. While most lots remain empty, The Pheasant Blue Collar Bar & Grill has a large heated tent set up in the lot on Gladys Avenue behind its restaurant.

"We get to open tomorrow," the restaurant wrote on its Facebook page on Wednesday, Dec. 2. "Yes, it will be outside, but you should see the winter wonderland we've put together to make you comfy."

Outside of the downtown area, Midway Bar & Grill offered dining inside a tent forming a dining space next to its building. The bar is "highly encouraging" people make reservations ahead of time to make sure there will be a table for them.

In Pendleton, the com-



A heated tent sits amid the fog outside The Pheasant Blue Collar Bar & Grill in Hermiston on Thursday, Dec. 3, 2020. This tent and others in town are used for outdoor dining in compliance with the most recent round of COVID-19 dining restrictions.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

munity took steps earlier in the year to expand its outdoor dining options, but trying to revive them on the eve of winter won't be

an easy task.

In September, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce and the Pendleton Downtown Association teamed up

to offer a 60-day expanded outdoor dining program, lending out seating, tables, umbrellas and fencing to

South Main Street restaurants to use in their on-street parking spots.

In the short term, the organizations hoped restaurants could use the space as

an extra source of revenue at a time when indoor dining was restricted by pandemic regulations. In the long term, the groups hoped to use the program as a trial run for more permanent outdoor dining infrastructure on Main.

The program ended in November, and bringing back outdoor dining during a time when most restaurants turn their attention indoors won't be as easy as dusting off some furniture.

In a Dec. 7 email, Cheri Rosenberg, the chamber's executive director, explained what obstacles local restaurants were facing.

Rosenberg said the chamber has lent outdoor heaters to the businesses that have requested them, but the fencing used earlier in the fall was leased and no longer available.

Additionally, Rosenberg said restaurants are contending with rules that require outdoor venues to be open on three sides and the overhead costs of serving customers willing to brave the cold.

"The chamber and PDA will continue to help in any way we can across all demographics," she wrote. "Eastern Oregon has always struggled to be heard at the state level & I think we are seeing that now more (than) ever, but we will continue to speak out & fight for our local businesses."



Riverside's Neftali Pacheco (1) vaults over a Cascade Christian defender to regain control of the ball during the first half against the Challengers. The Riverside Pirates defeated Cascade Christian 2-1 in the first round of the OSAA state playoffs at Riverside High School in Boardman on Nov. 5, 2019.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

OSAA: Late start in hopes of waiting out weather, COVID

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in Oregon that led to further restrictions being put in place by Gov. Kate Brown. Under the current regulations, 25 of Oregon's 36 counties are classified as 'extreme-risk' and have the highest level of restrictions.

Peter Weber, OSAA executive director, explained that because of that, only about 42 of the entity's member schools are in a location lower than extreme-risk.

"The OSAA and member schools are bound to follow the guidance for the state. They are not suggestions, they are requirements," Weber said.

He noted that full-contact sports currently are not allowed by the Oregon Health Authority, and that includes two of the sports in the season that was to start Dec. 28 — basketball and wrestling.

"Basketball and wrestling currently are still prohibited by the state," he said in opening the discussion at the virtual meeting. "We need to make some changes."

The board considered two proposals — one for two nine-week seasons that each had a culminating week,

and the adopted proposal of three six-week seasons.

Almost immediately, it was clear during the meeting that the three-season model was favored, as several board members expressed concern of the sports being split in such a way that athletes would have to choose between two events they would have otherwise taken part in. Under the two-season model, golf and swimming would have been included with the traditional fall sports, and basketball and wrestling would have been lumped in with the spring sports.

"I am concerned statewide with the overlapping of sports," said Curt Shelley, board vice president and superintendent at Tillamook. "I like the three-season sports season for that. I think it gets the prime time of the seasons and the best weather for that."

Dufur athletic director and football coach and 1A representative Jack Henderson offered his support for the three-season model.

"I, too, support the three-season model as well," he said. "The stacking is really, really difficult."

Jeff Clark, 2A representative and principal at Oak-

land High School, said the two-season model was not an option.

"A three-season model is our best option because it allows us to offer everything at this point," he said. "If we adopt the two-season model, we are already cancelling sports in some fashion."

Representatives for the Oregon Athletic Directors Association and the Oregon Athletic Officials Association also expressed concern with the overlap.

Jack Folliard, the OAOA rep on the executive board, said, for example, there are 1,000 basketball referees in the state, and 250 of them also ump baseball or softball. Overlapping those two sports would leave an already shorthanded officiating group statewide hamstrung.

"I cannot in good conscience guarantee we could cover sports in a two-season (model)," Folliard said.

Weber explained OSAA staff's reasoning for late February, saying that date allows for time for new COVID-19 cases to hopefully decrease and works around winter weather.

"By pushing that date further, we believe that sets us up for success," he said.

Toys: 'We've all had our stress and this is an excellent release for everybody'

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on their 2006 Honda VTX 1800, Phil dressed as Santa Claus with Beth riding in a sidecar beside him. The pair said they have been taking part in the ride for seven or eight years and enjoy the opportunity to give back to the community.

"It's a real honor to be part of this — with Al Sells' memory — and everything," Phil Spencer said. "It's an honor."

For the Spencers, this year's toy run served as more than an opportunity to bring joy to children and celebrate Sells' memory, it served as a release from the stresses of a global pandemic and an opportunity to bring joy to an entire community.

"We've all had our stress and this is an excellent release for everybody," Phil Spencer said.

Kandie Jensen, Sells' ex-wife, said Sells would



Riders depart Echo for the 17th annual Echo Toy Run on Saturday, Dec. 5, 2020.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

have found a way to make the toy run happen no matter the circumstances, and she commended the community for continuing through in his spirit.

"They weren't going to let it die," she said. "He wouldn't have. He would have done it if he'd been the only one riding."

Although Jensen has long had a part in collect-

ing toys for the Echo Toy Run, she said the event was one of Sells' greatest enjoyments and something that he took great pride in each year.

"He was always one of those people that he liked to help the kids — no matter what. He would do anything for children," she said. "This was his pride and joy."

Plaza: Mayor suggests postponement

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gathering place for public events, a magnet to attract customers to the north end of Main Street and as a spur to encourage further downtown development and revitalization by private building and business owners."

Charles Denight, the associate director of the development commission, said the city hired Portland landscape design firm Greenworks to create concept art of the plaza, with ideas ranging from a plaza that would take pedestrians all the way to the water's edge to an overlook of the river. Denight said the city would need to do more work beyond concept art if it was going to create more feasible plans.

But few on the council seemed enthusiastic about tackling the Byers project right away.

Councilor McKennon McDonald said she's seen nothing but negative comments on social media about the proposal, with some commenters won-

dering why they would prioritize it over street repair and other pressing issues.

"This project is coming on the heels of the big flood," she said. "It's coming on the heels of the pandemic."

A contingent of councilors seemed like they were more interested in the city acquiring the nearby Christian Science building at the corner of Main Street and Byers. Denight said the owners of the vacant building have offered to sell it to the city, but the commission would need to consider the condition of the building and the cost to maintain it.

Mayor John Turner said the commission should return to the Byers project in two to three years after the city has engaged in more street repair.

Public Works Director Bob Patterson reported to the commission on the city's latest efforts to do just that.

As a way to further boost street repair funding, the commission allocated \$10.9 million in

urban renewal funds to reconstruct streets across downtown Pendleton and some of the surrounding area.

Patterson reported that the commission could spend \$6.4 million to redo 10 streets in poor condition, but for a total of a total of \$10.3 million they could do much more.

In the more expansive version of the plan, the city could not only redo Southeast First and Southwest First streets, but also add landscaping, replace lighting and make other improvements.

The council decided it needed more time to decide the level of improvements it wanted to make to each First Street, but gave the green light to the other eight streets.

In an interview after the meeting, Patterson said city staff have since identified six other streets that would be eligible for the funding. He's going to present on all the streets, save First and First, at the council's next meeting on Dec. 15.