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'IT'S BEEN A LIVING HELL'

Legal case continues for local man and housing company

By NICK ROSENBERGER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Two-and-a-half years on and Wes Brooks, a disabled veteran, and Adair Homes Inc., a homebuilding company based in Washington State, remain locked in a legal battle over a home the company built near Pendleton.

Brooks and his wife, Ashley, contracted with the company in December 2017 to build a house after a fire tore through their previous home. But he said things weren't going right with Adair Homes from the start.

"We tried to stop the build," Brooks said, "and they wouldn't let us because of the contract that we signed. They reassured us several times, 'this all will get fixed, you won't have any issues.'"

But, a litany of unaddressed issues with the house has continued to plague the couple and their two young children, Jaxx and Raiden. From uneven walls and house siding that flies off in the wind to incomplete floors and uneven trim, the problems are apparent as soon as you step foot in the house.

"It's been a living hell," Brooks said.

When Brooks decided to create the public Facebook group Quality of Adair Homes' Reviews to publicize his complaints, the company responded with a defama-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Wes and Ashley Brooks pose for a portrait with their children Jaxx and Raiden on Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021, in front of their Adair Homes built house in rural Umatilla County. The Brooks have been stuck in a protracted legal battle with Adair Homes over the construction of the home and Brooks' decision to speak out against Adair's construction practices.

tion lawsuit for \$550,000 in damages.

According to the lawsuit, the company alleges Brooks has "instituted an active smear campaign against Adair" with his Facebook group.

The lawsuit states Brooks created a Facebook page improperly using Adair's trademarked name and that it contains false and inaccurate statements. Adair said some of these false statements include that the HVAC system was incorrectly sized and insufficient for the home, that "Adair is ripping them off by their

subcontractor's fudging the numbers" and items still are not fixed because Brooks told the company to take no action.

On Monday, Sept. 20, Brooks filed an answer in the Umatilla County Circuit Court denying these allegations.

In an interview, Brooks said he never made a comment that HVAC system was incorrectly sized or insufficient. Instead, "My argument was that the HVAC system wasn't what we had purchased in the original plans," he said.

As for the subcontractor "fudging the numbers," Brooks said it was not a statement he made. Instead, it was a

subcontractor who got on the Facebook group and posted a screenshot of a text exchange he had with an Adair superintendent who he claimed shorted him \$3,500. Brooks said he commented on the post to clarify the subcontractor's message.

And while it's true that items still are not fixed, Brooks said he told them that he'd prefer the subcontractors stopped because they were doing more damage every time they came to work.

"They would come out to rip out the kitchen floor and then damage the wall as they're doing it," he said. "So I was getting kind of tired of it because they kept sending the same subcontractors out every time."

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian
Several siding planks sit loose or missing on Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021, the side of Wes Brooks' home in rural Umatilla County. According to Brooks, the siding blanks have blown away in the wind and continue to come loose and drop off.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File
Galen Thompson, left, a registered nurse at St. Anthony Hospital, receives her initial dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 28, 2020, from infection prevention nurse Tracy Wart at the hospital in Pendleton. According to the Oregon Health Authority, more than a quarter of health care workers in Umatilla, Union and Morrow counties remain unvaccinated ahead of Gov. Kate Brown's Oct. 18, 2021, vaccine mandate deadline.

Health crisis in the making?

Oct. 18 deadline for health care workers comes at critical time in Umatilla County

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Eastern Oregon's health care system could see a mass exodus of workers come Oct. 18, the deadline for Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

More than a quarter of all health care workers in Umatilla, Union and Morrow counties remain unvaccinated, according to the Oregon Health Authority. All would be fired or forced to resign under the mandate.

"It's like a big game of chicken," said Dr. Jon Hitzman, Umatilla County's public health officer. "Who's going to relent first?"

Hospitals across the three counties say they are working to comply with the mandate, but none would disclose any specific plans for how they would adjust or alter operations if there is a shortage of workers.

"We understand this new requirement has been welcomed by some and has caused great concern for others," said Mardi Ford, spokesperson for Grande Ronde hospital in La Grande. "While we value every one of our employees and support their right to make that choice; as a private, not-for-profit Critical Access Hospital, we must follow this government directive to continue caring for our community. We do not want to lose a single member of our team."

Regional hospital officials in recent months have said they already were struggling with a shortage of workers. Staff have said they are exhausted after the delta variant ripped through the region, hospitalizing large swaths of unvaccinated people. In Umatilla County, the unvaccinated have accounted for about 49 out of every 50 hospitalizations this year, according to county data.

Hitzman said he's concerned a mass layoff would only exacerbate the problems the healthcare system is facing during the latest pandemic surge.

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A changing demographic

Trades, too, are having a tough time finding workers

By BILL BRADSHAW
AND ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

WALLOWA COUNTY — It's no secret that employers across the state are struggling to find workers. Business owners collectively furrow their brow at the trickle of job applications as more and more businesses open and the share of workers seems to be vanishing into thin air.

For some, that means closing restaurants entirely — but

far more often the effects of a tightening labor market mean that expansion of operations becomes difficult.

"It's pretty much across all industries," said Stacy Beckman, general manager of Wallowa County Grain Growers in Enterprise. "Managers I've talked to are having difficulty trying to get help."

He said the business he runs didn't actually lose any workers to the pandemic, but expanding his workforce has been a challenge.

"Trying to add (workers) is tough," he said. "It's even tougher in a smaller community like we are."

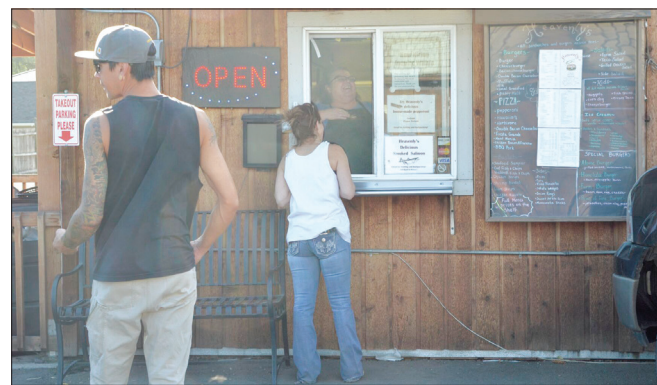
Cindy Ellis, who owns and

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the fourth in a five-part series by EO Media Group looking at the issue of the lack of workers for jobs in Central and Eastern Oregon — why workers are not returning to previously held jobs and how businesses are pivoting to function without being fully staffed.

operates Heavenly's Restaurant in Enterprise, switched to takeout only when the pandemic first struck, but was able to resume indoor seating as businesses were allowed to reopen. But then reliable employees became scarce.

"We had to cut our indoor



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Cindy Ellis, co-owner of Heavenly's Restaurant in Enterprise, greets customers through the takeout window Sept. 15, 2021. At times, takeout has been the only way Heavenly's Restaurant could serve, partially due to the lack of employees to man the inside seating.

seating because someone we hired didn't show," she said. Ellis said Heavenly's Restaurant was open for indoor seating when interviewed on Thursday, Sept. 16.

"We got a lot of folks from Elgin," she said, and despite a small workforce, "we were swamped."

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