

EAST OREGONIAN

OCTOBER 2-3, 2021

145th Year, No. 149

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INSIDE

UMATILLA RESTAURANT OWNERS BUILD 'BRIDGE' TO REVAMP FORMER BAR'S IMAGE REGION, A3



N.W. CRANE SERVICE IN 'BEST POSITION' EVER

Local business says employee satisfaction is among keys to avoiding employment problems



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Workers with N.W. Crane Service Inc., of Hermiston, unload parts of a crane while assembling it Monday, Sept. 27, 2021, at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington. The crane service is among several companies that have managed to avoid the staffing problems plaguing other industries as a result of the pandemic.

By ERICK PETERSON and SUZANNE ROIG
EO Media Group

HERMISTON — Not every company is feeling the employment pinch equally, according to some local construction companies and at least one economist.

People at N.W. Crane Service Inc. and other companies say they are not having the same problems with staffing as in other industries. And when they do have personnel issues, they are not related to the pandemic.

"We're blessed," said Ryan Karlson, logistics manager at N.W. Crane Service in Hermiston. Though he credited much of his success to luck, his company's achievements in hiring and maintaining staff seem to be more than a fluke.

First, he said, crane businesses attract a special sort of person. Karlson's company employs 12 crane operators and drivers. Karlson himself is an experienced crane operator and knows a thing or two about this type of worker.

Crane operators, he said, are excited by

the challenge of their work. Often, prior to beginning their careers, they looked up at cranes while doing other construction, and they wanted to get behind the controls of the huge machines.

This desire, he said, is sometimes hidden deep in their hearts. When they finally talk to an employer about crane work, and they learn about the opportunities, they are excited. And when they get a job, often they do not want to leave it.

Being able to offer employees a challenging, fulfilling and enjoyable job, then, accounts for part of N.W. Crane's employment success. This is not the end of the explanation, however.

A major reason Karlson has been able to foster loyalty is because he offers in-house certifications, which employees appreciate.

Certificates are important for crane operators. Many work sites,

including ones owned by Amazon, allow only certified workers. And many employers, Karlson said, require employees to find and pay for their own certificates.

He said he suspects his employees appreciate their training, but also other perks. He offers insurance and vacations. Depending on their experience, a new driver can earn \$20 to \$22 per hour. His crane operators can earn \$23 to \$40 or more.

These are nonunion jobs, but Karlson said employees can benefit from not being union members. Union employees, he said, might have to wait years before they can receive crane training. This is not the case for his workers — they can start training right away.

See Work, Page A10

EDITOR'S NOTE

Today is the fifth of a five-part series of articles by EO Media Group looking at the lack of workers for jobs in Central, Eastern and Coastal Oregon — why workers are not returning to previously held jobs and how businesses are functioning without being fully staffed. This last segment looks to the future.

COVID-19 shutdown

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

In the days leading up to closing his Stanfield store, RetroRagz shop owner Dave Bender was sorting out the antiques inside. He was trying to figure which items he still could sell, which he could give away and which he could keep for himself.

Bender received two positive tests for COVID-19 on separate occasions at RiteAid pharmacies. The first positive test was in July 2020 in Everett, Washington. The second was in Hermiston. But said he thinks he actually suffered one case prior to the other two.

Multiple COVID-19 cases

Getting COVID-19 twice, according to Joseph Fiumara, Umatilla County Public Health director, is not unheard of.

"We consider everyone who is not vaccinated to be susceptible to infection, and this includes individuals who have already tested positive before," he said. "Per Oregon Health Authority guidelines, any individual who tests positive, symptomatic or not, 90 days after previously testing positive is considered to be reinfected."

People commonly think their first infection leads to developing antibodies, he explained, which protect them from another infection. But this is not the case, and the "immune system is much more complex than that," he said.

Verified multi-occurrence cases of COVID-19, though, are uncommon, Fiumara said. His department claims there have been 116 such cases through Aug. 31.

"We do not have many documented reinfections, so I do believe it is rare," he said. "Three times is likely very rare."

Bender's troubles

Back in December 2019, Bender became ill with what he thought was a common flu. It was strange, because he had unusual symptoms — loss of smell and taste, common symptoms of COVID-19. But he did not, then, think it was the emerging coronavirus.

See RetroRagz, Page A10



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Dave Bender, RetroRagz shop owner, inspects "Stanley," a wooden seal on Sept. 24, 2021. The seal was among items that he was selling in his Stanfield store prior to closing it after he caught COVID-19 at least twice.

Local autism advocate reaches social media stardom



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

William Wehrli, and his 4-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever Rossy, pose for a portrait on the porch of Wehrli's home Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021 in Pendleton. Wehrli, who has autism and is a local autism advocate, made a video supporting a boy who has autism, and the video went viral.

By BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When the social media star announced in a video that her 5-year-old son has autism, William Wehrli knew he wanted to reach out.

Wehrli has autism and is a local autism advocate living in Pendleton. He wanted to tell her that doctors predicted he would never be independent or graduate; that he proved them wrong when he obtained his master's degree; that he has his own home, pays his rent, owns a car, cares for a dog, cooks, cleans and works many jobs.

He made a video on Sept. 5 on TikTok, the social networking service focused on sharing videos, saying just that.

"This was me assuring that her son

would also be able to succeed and be independent," Wehrli said.

He was shocked when Laura Clery responded.

Clery is an actress and comedian who consistently receives millions of views across multiple social media platforms. She took a video with her husband reacting to Wehrli's video. They smiled, held their hands over their heart and blew kisses. As with all of her videos, thousands of people commented back.

Who's cutting onions? Clery wrote in the comments.

"I'm not crying my eyes are just swelling," a commenter said. "My grandson has autism. This video makes me so happy. Thanks for sharing."

See Autism, Page A10