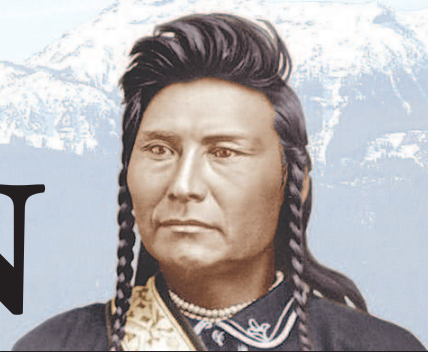




Kayaks await visiting tourists at the Wallowa Lake Marina.
Paul Wahl/Chieftain

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Wallowa County braces for annual invasion of tourists

By Paul Wahl
Wallowa County Chieftain

Mary Wolfe was one of dozens of business owners in and around Wallowa Lake getting ready for the onslaught of tourists this week. Wolfe, the owner of Mad Mary's in downtown Joseph, and her partner, Jeff Middleton, have been preparing the former restaurant adjacent to her shop to become an ice cream parlor.

"We operated the restaurant for several years, but it just became too much," said Wolfe, a fifth-generation Wallowa County native. "This year, we decided to open Mad Mary's Ice Cream Station."

Umpqua Dairy in Roseburg will provide the ice cream. Wolfe said she hasn't decided yet which 20 of the available flavors will be offered.

In addition to its checkerboard floor, the space is also home to a variety of collectibles courtesy of Middleton, including a Phillips 66 gas pump from 1936 and an Indian motorcycle.

Across the street, Becky Rushton is preparing for a busy summer. She and her husband, Scott, own Outlaw Restaurant and Saloon, in addition to two lodging businesses.

Becky, president of the Joseph Chamber of Commerce, is anticipating a busy summer, "better than last year."

"There have been a lot of positive signs already, she added, noting the scheduling of two new community events in the area and at least one new business, a hot air balloon concession.

Downtown Joseph businesses will have one final opportunity to participate in a cleanup event Wednesday. The previously scheduled event was rained out.

On the shores of Wallowa Lake, summer is beginning to make an appearance after one of the worst winters in recent memory.

TOURISM: Continued on Page 5

Spending rises

By Paul Wahl
Wallowa County Chieftain

The tourism industry grew to \$29.3 million in 2016, according to a report published last week by Travel Oregon.

The bulk of that amount was spent on accommodations, food services, food stores, local transportation and gas, arts and recreation and retail sales.

Tourism spending was up roughly a million dollars over 2015 and almost \$4 million over the 2008 figure.

The study was designed to measure the overall contribution of the travel and tourism industry in the state, according to Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon.

"We wanted to drill down and provide

information on the additional economic impact in the seven regions as well as for each county," Davidson said.

Wallowa County numbers were up in each of the past four years.

Earnings generated by tourism rose to \$12.7 million in 2016, up \$800,000 from the previous year. Davidson defined that number as the total for salaries and wages, including profits of the sole proprietorships.

Tourism supported 590 jobs in the county in 2016, up from 490 in 2010. Accommodation and food services jobs accounted for most of the jobs, while arts, entertainment and recreation were the second largest chunk.

See STUDY, Page A5

County budget woes

Tough calls are facing commissioners

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Revenue shortfalls are making the budgeting process difficult for the Wallowa County Commission.

The budget cycle began with the announcement of the loss of nearly \$1 million from Secure Rural Schools funding, a federal revenue program that has been in place for several years.

Several unpopular decisions to help balance the numbers have been met with opposition in the community. The announcement of the closure of the county's library caught the public by surprise and created a minor furor, as did the recently announced closure of several of the county's landfill transfer stations July 1.

While it may seem odd that a \$1 million cut from a budget of \$19 million should be problematic, county officials say a look at the bigger picture shows just how tenuous the county's finances have become over the past few years. For example, the general fund, which finances many county services such as the district attorney's office and the landfill, receives \$1.9 million from county taxpayers, most of it in the form of property tax revenue.

While county property owners shell out about \$8 million a year in property taxes, the majority of it is collected for special districts. The Education Service District collects nearly \$3 million alone. Also included are the school districts, hospital districts, cities and others.

This year, the county's budget committee determined that the general fund needed \$5.6 million to function adequately. Some of the money comes from grants and several departments generate revenue, although not enough to cover expenses.

The sheriff's office brings in around \$245,000 in revenue for gun registration fees, fines and a \$119,000 contract to provide extra services in Joseph. The sheriff began the 2017-2018 budget cycle with a proposed budget of \$1,198,136, but during the deliberations, the committee recommended an approved budget of \$1,075,670, a \$122,466 cut.

See BUDGET, Page A5

One year down: EPD chief settling in

Joel Fish discovers a 'little bit bigger drug problem,' sings praises of staff

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Enterprise Police Chief Joel Fish says he is feeling right at home after a year in his position.

Fish, his wife of 27 years Catherine, and son Joe, 11, have been made to feel right at home.

"I love it here," he said. "My son commented last week that he thought it was good for him that we moved here."

Fish arrived in Enterprise

from Hickory, N.C., where he served as captain in variety of positions in the Catawba County Sheriff Office — captain of investigations, patrol captain and captain of communications, in addition to overseeing school resources officers for 26 schools and overseeing the crime-prevention program.

His former department had 192 employees, with around 72 working the jail and fielded 11,680 calls for service in 2015.

But although he had full



Fish



Curtis



Billman

confidence in his own ability to handle whatever came up, he knew the department had challenges.

A number of those were handled before he got to town.

Officer George Kohlhepp went to work making sure officers had department-owned firearms and revamping the handling of evidence as recommended by the police chiefs who had assisted in re-

viewing the department.

Bringing his forces up to full strength and making a cohesive team were still top of the list for Fish.

See CHIEF, Page A6

