

Business brings living wages to county



By Bill Bradshaw

JOSEPH — Rick LaFave is bringing to Wallowa County something many have noted the county sorely needs — jobs that pay a living wage to as many as 25 people.

His Renaissance Design Fabrication & Powder Coating company is slated to open at the end of Russell Lane just outside of Joseph about May 20, he said on Wednesday, May 5.

“I’m not going to base the wages on what they are in Wallowa County,” he said. “My wages are going to be based on what my company does as a whole. So if I have a welder/fabricator making, say, \$22 an hour over in Forest Grove doing the same job, he’s going to be making \$22 an hour here. It’s the scale of how the company is set up. It doesn’t matter if it’s here, North Plains or Forest Grove. I’ve got three shops and they’re all on the same scale.”

The Joseph operation will be LaFave’s third such shop. He and wife, Carey, also own a couple restaurant/bars and a commercial/residential painting company on the west side of the state, as well as two holding companies through which he’s bought commercial properties. The couple also recently purchased the Imnaha River Bed & Breakfast, which Carey will operate.

LaFave said the 17-year-old RDF&P largely caters to the high-tech industry.

“Everybody from Micron, Intel — anybody who’s big into the high tech, we supply them with the goods to build ‘clean rooms’ where they make (computer) chips,” he



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Rick LaFave stands by the control computer for the sheet metal shear used to cut metal at his Renaissance Design, Fabrication and Powder Coating business just outside of Joseph on Wednesday, May 5, 2021. He plans to open the shop about May 20.

said. “They build a plant and I supply a lot of the steel stuff that goes into those plants.”

LaFave said his shop is specialized in terms of the equipment it uses for computer chip machines, and that these tool pedestals are always being upgraded.

“Most often, when that happens, they change out the whole tool and every tool has a different footprint and it sits on a raised-access floor and I build the frames that go underneath them — the pedestal,” he said. “That turns us multiple millions of dollars a year.”

In fact, the payroll for his 100-plus employees is around \$3 million a year, he said. He offers a full slate of benefits to both hourly and salaried employees.

“I’m basically just the president and CEO and I let them do their

jobs,” he said.

Of course, most of that payroll won’t be in Wallowa County, but a large portion will be. He said his two shops on the west side are currently buried in back orders and he plans to direct the overflow here. He has a fleet of about 50 trucks that can haul raw materials and finished products.

LaFave said he’s planning to hire almost entirely local people. The only person he plans to bring from the west side is Greg Doty, who will serve as shop foreman.

“Experienced welders, they’re going to range anywhere from \$18.50 to \$24 an hour, depending on what they know,” he said.

Welders don’t have to be experts in the work they’ll do at RDF&P. He said he plans to have them trained at his Forest Grove shop.

“If a guy can weld, we can teach him the rest,” he said. “We can make welders better welders.”

He also plans to hire a salesman who is familiar with the county and its residents — who has the “gift of gab.”

“I’m looking for someone who grew up around here, knows all the farmers, the fish and wildlife,” he said.

LaFave is already eyeing expansion. At present, he’s leasing the building where he’ll soon open, but he’s in discussion with the owner about buying it. He’s also talking about purchasing an adjoining building to house expanded operations.

He’s also considering expanding into Idaho.

“I’m contemplating Boise next,” he said. “I have custom-

ers there who’d like me to open up something.”

The company’s name — RDF&P — fully describes what it’s about, LaFave said. The R, for Renaissance, evokes a prestigious quality. Also, his prior company — Rick’s Fasteners — had a prominent R in the logo. The Design portion is about designing whatever the customer wants. Fabrication is what they do with the design. Powder coating is electrostatic finishing process using a powdered acrylic-type paint applied in a paint booth. The steel gets a negative charge and the paint powder gets positive charge, which makes them stick together. Then, they’re baked in oven.

“To get powder coating in Wallowa County, you’d have to go to Lewiston or La Grande,” he said, adding that he believes RDF&P may be the only company in Oregon that does an entire project from start to finish.

As for the Imnaha River B&B, the LaFaves plan that as a “destination location,” handling group events that will book the entire place and it will otherwise be closed.

“I don’t want to take business away from the Imnaha Hotel,” LaFave said. “They’re good people down there. If one couple or two couples are coming to town, I’d rather they stay at the hotel.”

Overall, he’s hoping his business ventures in the county will be seen as a plus.

“It’ll be good for Wallowa County. Like I said, I’m going to be hiring local,” he said. “I like Joseph and Enterprise, the small-town feel.”

Bill Bradshaw is a reporter for the Wallowa County Chieftain. Have a business tip? Contact him at 541-398-5503 or bbradshaw@wallowa.com.



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CLUES ACROSS

- Generous helpings of 1-Down
- Dish soap brand
- Air (tablet)
- Ready for a renter
- Indonesian honeymoon destination
- Forbidden act
- Exit’s opposite
- Reason for a hung jury
- New ___ music
- Brainstorming output
- Makes angry
- “Slaughterhouse-Five” novelist
- Attended, or departed
- Punishment for a toddler
- Type of flute
- Lady ___ (singer at Biden’s inauguration)
- Basis for some vaccines, briefly
- Prominent members of orchestras
- Only just get, with “out”
- Poker holding
- Popular e-reader
- Savoy Theatre’s London district
- Like Beethoven, late in life
- Spirit with Peppar and Mandrin flavors
- “Lo and behold!”
- Predator of the deep
- Take sides?
- Inflatable river ride, and what 18-, 24-, 38- or 51-Across contain?
- “Let me run that errand”
- Consumer price index subj.
- Binary digits
- “Back to Me” singer Lindsay
- Message status
- Partner of “turn”
- Pigs, collectively

CLUES DOWN

- Porterhouse, e.g.
- Cute sound?
- Make tweaks to

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15					16			
17						18					19			
20					21	22					23			
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46					47					48	49	50		
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56	57	58								59				60
61						62	63					64	65	
66												68		
69														71

- Honey source
- Try hard
- Part of AWOL
- Maria Kondo’s country of birth
- Against ___ odds
- Top number on a sundial
- Beckon, as trouble
- Where you might see a noodle or a float
- Cost of a 44-Across
- Accomplishes
- President elected in 1948
- “White Noise” novelist DeLillo
- What the animals boarded Noah’s Ark in
- Coatition abbr.
- Model Hadid
- Roughly
- “... us a son is given” (Isaiah)
- Chore
- Three or four, say
- Social media approval

- ___ leches cake
- Shiva, e.g.
- What lawyers pass
- Vehicles for moving
- Intro to Chinese?
- Facts and figures
- Knack
- Being under it is threatening
- “I could keep going, but I won’t”: Abbr.
- Is of benefit
- Frontal and occipital
- New ___ (world capital)
- Elena of the court
- Set things right
- Competes (for)
- The second “O” of YOLO
- Privy to
- Tater ___
- Cinco - cuatro
- Down in the dumps



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