

Sheet metal manufacturing shop reopens in Wallowa



By Bill Bradshaw

Owner has high hopes for expansion, more jobs

WALLOWA — An expanded sheet metal manufacturing business held its grand reopening Wednesday, May 25, in Wallowa, with promises of more high-paying jobs and the transition to an employee-owned company.

“The jobs we’re creating here, it’s not about money, it’s not about equip-

ment. It’s about you guys,” co-owner Theodore Jones told his workers after a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

“That’s reflected in our pay, it’s reflected in our efforts to train you.”

A relaunch of Kni-Co Manufacturing and Magnum Metals comes with the expansion of what had been a 1,000-square-foot facility along the town’s truck route to a 4,000-square-foot building with many new machines.

Jones and his wife and partner Molly, who live in Draper, Utah, purchased Kni-Co from Robert Burns in early 2020. Since then, they’ve been expanding the facility that largely constructs gas cabinets for the semiconductor industry and a camp stove sold through Cabela’s outdoor shops, Bass Pro



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

From left, Kni-Co Manufacturing co-owners Molly and Theodore Jones cut a ribbon to mark the sheet metal plant’s grand reopening Wednesday, May 25, 2022, while plant manager Robert Burns, Michael Reese and Kelly Guentert watch.

Shop and similar outlets.

To accomplish this work, they’ve added new, high-tech machines such as a press brake that bends sheet-metal parts, a powder-coating (paint) system, an oven to bake on and dry the paint at 400 degrees Fahrenheit, a wash system and several welding stations.

Although the Joneses plan to remain living in Utah, Burns will continue as the manager of the Wallowa facility. He purchased Kni-Co from its original

owner in 2000 and plans “to be here until he retires,” Theodore Jones said.

Top jobs

It’s the people of Wallowa County who Jones is most interested in.

“We really want to promote the culture here because it’s about the people,” he said. “We can buy more equipment and make more money, but we can’t replace great people. We want to build high-performance jobs that people are high-paid and

KNI-CO MANUFACTURING

What: Sheet metal manufacturer

Who: Theodore and Molly Jones

Where: 103 E. 5th St., Wallowa

Phone: 801-572-5515

Email: info@criticalsystemsinc.com

Online: www.criticalsystemsinc.com

high-skilled.”

At present, the hourly wage at Kni-Co starts at \$15 an hour. Jones said that will increase to \$16 an hour soon. The top-end jobs go up into the \$20s and into the \$30s for management positions.

But it’s the employee stock-ownership program (ESOP) that Jones is really touting. He said he learned about how well an ESOP program can work while working in California’s Silicon Valley in the 1980s. One co-worker there told him he was to retire as a millionaire soon from the ESOP benefits.

“I would expect that everyone in this company — if everything goes as expected — everybody here, I’m going to do my best to help everybody here become a millionaire,” he said. “It’s a big goal, but we have a big opportunity. What I want to talk to you guys about culturally is that you’re the owners now.”

As such, he urged his employees to “change the way you’re thinking,” he said, focusing on efficiency and how to do their jobs faster and better.

Plans to expand

Jones expects to be able to continue to grow his company without the threat of overseas competition.

“Sheet metal doesn’t ship well,” he said, adding that its weight and size makes shipping it difficult and expensive. So sheet metal products are a natural for home production.

As a result, he also expects to be able to add more employees. Since Jones took over from Burns, the staff increased from six to 18. He envisions a staff of 40-50 eventually.

And he’s eager to hire locally. At present, all but one of Kni-Co’s workers live in Wallowa and the other in Joseph. Jones hopes to add more locals to the growing staff.

New workers don’t necessarily have to be trained in sheet-metal work, Jones said.

“They’ll become skilled once we train them,” he said. “We’re looking for people with a high energy level and a work ethic who want to learn and want to develop some skills and we can train them. We definitely want to hire local.”

During his talk, Jones definitely was the company cheerleader.

“We’re going to do fine and we’re going to keep expanding,” he said. “We want you guys to win. Our goal is to have you guys win.”

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**
- Hyphen relative
 - Itsy-___
 - Nonstandard nickname for the Golden State
 - Cosmetics chain
 - Join forces
 - Tweak, as a crossword
 - Simians studied by a certain primatologist? (OWL)
 - “Hahaha,” in a text
 - Jheri ___ (hairdo)
 - Wrath
 - Push away
 - Claw for building a nest
 - Bog accumulations
 - Nick a china dish? (CROW)
 - Sympathized with
 - Particles such as Na+ and Cl-
 - AOC or JFK, e.g.
 - Langston Hughes poem
 - Japanese noodle soup
 - Croat’s neighbor
 - Southern sch. by the Mississippi
 - ___ bomb (Japanese drink)
 - “Makes sense to me”
 - Certain frilly Middle Eastern fabric? (WREN)
 - Long part of a golf club
 - Answers a Paperless Post
 - The “T” in THC
 - Ruckus
 - Court reporters’ channel?
 - Oodles and oodles
 - “Did you hold hands?” e.g. (ROBIN)
 - 2021 sci-fi remake starring Zendaya
 - “Am not!” comeback
 - Facial breakout
 - Did an impression of
 - Weighed down
 - Marsh plant

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- CLUES DOWN**
- “Thanks, Captain Obvious”
 - Apt name for a smartie?
 - Walk proudly
 - Amateur broadcaster’s set
 - Cinamon ___
 - Signing, as a contract
 - Amphitheater level
 - Eyelid inflammation
 - “You’re correct”
 - Post bag contents?
 - Animal shelter’s rehoming initiative
 - Self report?
 - “___ be OK”
 - Skateboarder’s “no hands” trick
 - Gym rat’s count
 - Ready to pour
 - Bic tips
 - Stopwatch
 - Groundbreaking tool?
 - Iris of Marvel films
 - Tablet in a bottle
 - “We’re being framed!”
 - Push-button phone type
 - Dana Elaine Owens, ___ Queen Latifah
 - Daytime TV idol
 - A remote may slip between its cushions
 - Donates
 - Merited
 - Incite, like suspicion
 - Cinnamon or ginger
 - “Behold my brilliance!”
 - City south of New Delhi
 - Banned from a competition, briefly
 - Word hidden in “run on empty”
 - Gal ___
 - Immeasurably long time
 - Homer’s neighbor

Church Directory

Joseph United Methodist Church

3rd & Lake St. • Joseph

10 AM Worship
Online AND In Person

For More Info
541-432-3102
JosephUMC.ORG

Pastor Cherie Dearth

Grace Lutheran Church

409 West Main - Enterprise

SUNDAY WORSHIP
at 9am

Pastor John B. King Jr
phone (message): 541-426-4633
web: gracelutheranenterprise.com

Enterprise Christian Church

85035 Joseph Hwy • (541) 426-3449

We have “In-person worship” @ 9:00 am
(Guidelines observed)

Sunday School at 10:30

Parking Lot Radio/Facebook @ 9:00

David Bruce
Pastor, Enterprise Christian Church

St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church

100 NE 3rd St, Enterprise
NE 3rd & Main St

541-426-3439
Worship Service
Sunday 9:30am

Lostine Presbyterian Church

Discussion Group 9:30 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM

Childrens program during service
Blog: dancingforth.blogspot.com

541.398.0597
Hwy 82, Lostine
Stephen Kliever, Minister

Summit Church

Sundays at 10 am
at the Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise

Pastor: David Pendleton

Summit Church
www.summitchurchoregon.org
Cloverleaf Hall • 668 NW 1st St. • Enterprise, OR 97828

Wallowa Assembly of God

702 West Hwy 82
Wallowa, Oregon
541-886-8445

Sunday School • 9:am
Worship Service • 10:am

Pastor Tim Barton
Visit Us on

Christ Covenant Church

Pastor Terry Tollefson
Church Office: 541-263-0505

Family Prayer - 9:30 AM
Worship - 10:00 AM

723 College Street, Lostine

Seventh-Day Adventist Church & School

305 Wagner (near the Cemetery)
P.O. Box N, Enterprise, OR 97828
Church 541-426-3751
School 541-426-8339

Pastor David Ballard 503-810-9886

Worship Hour
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