

Workforce from 6A

He bought the restaurant in June 2015. Not wanting to miss the summer season, he planned on opening July 4.

"For the fourth, we just had hot dogs and grilled cheese, and we were pumping them out," he said. "It was very encouraging to sell \$1,500 in grilled cheese and hot dogs a day."

His expectations were high, but hot dogs and grilled cheese weren't really his thing. He had a grander vision for his restaurant, which the community wasn't really excited about.

"I was raised health conscious," he said. "Comfort food was like tofu tacos. I always thought the general population wanted a healthier option, things you can't find here. And the people pretty much spoke what they wanted."

They wanted burgers and fries, so he put in a fryer and business was booming again.

"We were pumping," he said. "Oh lord, we had fresh cut fries, we had burger patties. We had people saying, 'This is the best thing I've ever had.'"

But one of the things the customers didn't ask for was the smoke from the fryers. He didn't realize how bad it was until he received a negative Yelp review.

"It said, 'Look, you're filling the place with oil vapor,'" Khufu recalled. "It stinks. We're choking."

Being new to the business and without training, he thought that an electric fryer wouldn't create much smoke. That might have been true if he had a ventilation hood, which he didn't. He was forced to ditch the fryer, which meant he got rid of the fries.

"The profit on French fries is phenomenal," he said. "You can buy a 40-pound bag of potatoes for \$10. So, you sell 8 or 9 ounces for 8 bucks, you can't beat that."

But after the loss of the fries, sales dropped 40 percent.

At the same time, Khufu was having difficulty with his staff. Unlike Fred Meyer, Khufu had no troubles

finding people during the summer, due largely in part to the fact he couldn't afford background checks and drug tests.

"You don't have a hard time finding people," he said. "You have a hard time finding people that have a work ethic that aren't alcoholics or drug addicts. It is unbelievable. We're talking hard drugs."

A few had illegal drug problems like meth and heroin. Others had alcoholism issues.

"Everything seems to be fine, then two to three weeks later, bam!" he said. "All the nasty stuff starts coming out. You confront them and they go, 'Oh, no, I'm getting better.' No, this is a pattern. This can't happen again. But it does. So, you fire them."

Other employees who didn't have drug issues seemed to get discouraged as summer began to wane. They lost interest in the job. As to why, Khufu said he really didn't know.

"It's a very poignant question," he said. "Why is it so difficult to have people that are stable? I think it's a behavior thing. Maybe they never found the joy or the fulfillment of working steady and making ends meet."

As Florence Chamber of Commerce Board President, Bobby Jensen has seen issues with demoralization and addiction problems in Florence as well, some of it caused by the very boom and bust nature of the tourist economy.

"If I got left out and I have no work to do, what am I going to turn to?" he said. "You're going to turn to different things."

Employees find steady jobs during the summer, but get laid off during the winter. Repeat ad nauseum. The stress can be unbearable.

"We have the most challenged people in the country, and we have some of the most giving, prosperous people in Florence," Jensen said. "We're really both sides. It could be worse, but it could be better. What we need to do is balance it out."

And like those extremes, Khufu has plenty of positive experiences with employees.

"Oh yes, you find great employ-

ees. Although, because of limited hours, I can't give them everything that they deserve. I tell them, 'I love you. You're awesome. But there's going to come a time when you want more hours. You can ask, but I can't guarantee. If you find something better, just tell me. It's going to be okay. Just be honest and up front about it. Just don't quit that day. Give me a heads up.' I let them go. Once you leave the cage open, some birds will return."

He says he tries to give his employees whatever benefits he can, paying them a full wage and giving them all the tips, including the ones he receives. But as the fall comes, the hours get cut back. By winter, he can only do one thing.

"Cry," he said. "You cut down on as much cost as you can. I have one person work."

The one person is his cook. The rest of the staff? Just Khufu.

"We're open seven days a week. I can't work if I'm sick. So, I have to close. But I'm sitting at home going, 'God, I could just be making a little bit of money today.' But in the back of my mind, I know I have to stay healthy," he said.

And then there's the fact that there's no capital coming in.

"How do you survive? There's business owners I've been friends with who say, 'You are going to end up taking out a loan. Believe you me, you're gonna have to borrow money in this town come winter.' That was very helpful, because otherwise I wouldn't have stayed open."

It took a lot of advice from small business owners. Khufu, who is in his

early 40s, found the help of other young entrepreneurs vital.

"When I started up my business, Old Town Barber Shop had just opened up. La Bu La just started up. Spice was just bought and started up again. It was this core group of young entrepreneurs, and we were all rooting for each other and coming to see each other," he said.

They would teach each other tricks of the town and give pointers on how to actually do tasks like payroll.

Using this network of advice, Khufu has remodeled the restaurant twice. It took him a while to figure out how to get the proper flow of his establishment — putting tables in the right place, removing the pool table that was taking up space. While he had to take out another loan to do that, he's confident he'll pay it back within two years.

Siuslaw Riverside has hired two new cooks since then, whom he credits for saving the restaurant after the French fry debacle.

Riverside went back to its roots, serving healthy food but doing so in a way that would attract a more traditional clientele. They have staples that will always remain, like the gyro and his Blast sandwich, but they're always mixing up their specials, trying new things.

According to the Bureaus of Labor Statistics, almost 20 percent of new businesses fail after their first year. Khufu has beaten the odds so far. And he plans on continuing to do that.

"The future is always uncertain. However, I remain hopeful," he said.

As a restaurateur, Khufu is somewhat regulated to the boom and bust

of the tourism industry, but other businesses are trying to break out of the mold. They're doing so by targeting key markets.

"Boats and fancy cars"

"In order to have a stable foundation, you really need to have three legs to a stool, as opposed to two," Florence City Manager Erin Reynolds said about the Florence economy.

Reynolds, along with Mayor Joe Henry, the Florence City Council, and the city's small but dedicated staff, have been working on building an economic development plan for the past few years.

"It's very hard to sit on a stool with two legs," she said. "While it's been an incredibly positive experience in Florence to have tourism and the retirement community as our base, we realized very early on in these efforts that we needed a third leg to that stool. Not taking away the important tourism and retirees, but recognizing that we need more diversity in our portfolio."

The Siuslaw region's "third leg" may come from businesses like Breen Marine, owned by Jensen. The boat repair company touches both of Florence's main industries.

"Everybody who retires here eventually buys a boat at some point," Jensen said. "Most of our customers are retired. The retirement

industry is solid, and it's great that we have that."

But the tourism industry can be difficult for employees.

"Boat owners forget they even own a boat in the off season," he said.

Because of that, he has had to lay off employees when winter comes.

"I hate the idea of laying people off and trying to rehire," he said. "That's just not acceptable."

To offset his winter losses, Jensen is looking toward manufacturing a device he's developed while fixing boats.

"It's called a transducer shield," he said. "It mounts to the back of a boat, kind of a technical thing, but highly needed on 40 percent of the boats on the market in the world."

The product combines transducer blocks and spray shields together to protect sensitive electrical equipment from the spray of the water.

He has a provisional patent on the device, and Jensen hopes he can produce it year-round — boat repair during the busy summer months, and global manufacturer the rest of the time.

One of Jensen's inspirations for his fabrication business model is Florence business Top Hydraulics, a small manufacturer that ships its goods throughout the world, with

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