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CITY *from page 8A*

product that could utilize her fused glass art pieces, then pivoted to creating a studio space in Historic Old Town Florence. Plus, she has launched special curated gift and art boxes catering to a variety of needs and seasons.

"RAIN provides incredible opportunities for knowledge, growth and support," Smoley said. "If you're an entrepreneur or thinking about starting a business, I would definitely recommend that you become involved with RAIN. ... We couldn't be where we are today without them."

The event's signature sponsor was Oregon Pacific Bank, with CEO Ron Green leading a panel of "ecosystem players," as Cummings described.

Green first spoke about the bank and its history.

"People don't think about banks as small businesses," he said. "Oregon Pacific Bank is the product of five entrepreneurs in this community who got together 40 years ago this month. Whether you're a tire shop, an art studio or a bank, you've got to start somewhere and you want to do something that creates value for everyone you interact with. So they came together and said, 'How can we do something materially different for this community?' Forty years later we are a considerably larger bank, but we're still a small bank headquartered here."

He added the opportunity to partner with RAIN for events like this one "is absolutely what OPB is all about. It's not just a financial sponsorship; it's an honor for a company like

ourselves to say we are part of this."

Green then moderated the eight-person panel consisting of the partners who help with Florence's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The speakers were Lane County Community and Economic Development Manager Austin Ramirez, Lane Community College Florence Center Dean Russ Pierson, Lane SBDC Director Robert Killen, Florence Chamber Executive Director Bettina Hannigan, Siuslaw News Features Editor Chantelle Meyer, Reynolds and Smoley.

"These are folks that help drive what we're doing in this ecosystem in this community," Green said.

Each participant answered two questions from Green: each organization's role in small business development and how Florence's ecosystem has changed in the past four years.

For Reynolds, she said the City of Florence's role is leadership. Thanks to the city council, she and city staff have been empowered to lead the community path on the path to innovation. As to the second half, she said awareness is the biggest change while people learn of and connect to economic development resources.

Hannigan reiterated the chamber's role as "conveners, catalysts and champions:" bringing people together with resources, helping people take their dreams to the next level and championing business. For the second part, she said that she loves that "Businesses are seen as answers to a lot of questions and needs in this community. ... They are heroes here."

Smoley said her role is offer a creative space to bring entrepreneurs, artists and creative people together, and that has shifted to include mentoring others. In the past four years, "an incredible support system"

has developed.

As to the Siuslaw News, Meyer said in 2020 it will be celebrating 130 years of supporting residents, organizations, businesses and nonprofits through stories, advertisements, press releases, events and publications. In the past four years, she has seen the hand-off from RAIN and the city to the entrepreneurs, who took ownership of their own path and helped create such a thriving ecosystem.

For Pierson, he emphasized that LCC is "this community's college" as it offers education and resources, as well as connections to additional partners like the SBDC. He said Florence's entrepreneurial ecosystem is giving people a way into something new as they follow their dreams and actually make money. With so many Oregon residents underemployed, resources available now can help them achieve a living-wage job.

Ramirez said that for Lane County Community and Economic Development, "Our goal is to create economic opportunity from the coast to the Cascades. That's for everyone." In his 18 months of living in Oregon, he has seen Oregon entrepreneurs dive in, have grit and get things done with a lot of momentum.

Killen has been with Lane SBDC for five months. He said the center will be more present on coast in 2020 as it works with residents. He said that economic development results from vision and courage across the board, especially through community buy-in.

"All of you who are entrepreneurs, or who want to be and have a vision — man, do it," Green said. "Because you will not be sorry. Yes, you will work more, you will sweat more, you will grind your teeth and lose all your hair, but

the rewards to the benefit of the community and yourself are going to come back to you tenfold. ... I think the idea of local reinvestment, whether its non-profit, volunteering, having a small business with one employee or having a small business like we do with 65 employees in Florence, you give back and reinvest. It's what's going to sustain this community for generations to come. I just applaud all of you for what you are doing."

Afterwards, Ruben invited community members to stand and give one-minute business pitches. People's ideas ranged from new business and studio space to high schoolers' ideas for a customizable clothing store and rural food delivery.

As Florence's venture catalyst, she is in the area two days each week to meet with entrepreneurs and business owners. She can be contacted through ariel@oregonrain.org. In addition, RAIN is accepting applications through Dec. 6 for its 12-week 2020 Florence Pre-Accelerator Program.

Earlier in the night, Cummings said, "I can't believe it's been four years since we were in this same exact room launching this work. To see so many faces, and so many new people, is really what this event is about. Not only celebrating the companies we've helped in the last several years and the ecosystem, but all the new faces. ... I always say it takes a community to raise an entrepreneur, and it does."

For more information about RAIN, visit oregonrain.org or www.meetup.com/Startup-Florence-Oregon-Coast. The organization's next event is Thursday, Dec. 5, for "Angel Investing 101" at 5:30 p.m. at The Bodega, 180 Laurel St.

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ALGAE *from page 1A*

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