

Baker City Herald

April 23, 2020

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IN THIS EDITION: Local • Business & AgLife • Go! magazine \$1.50

GO! Magazine
A look at
restaurants
offering takeout
meals in Baker,
Wallowa counties

THE TO-GO ISSUE
Part 1: Baker & Wallowa counties

QUICK HITS

Good Day Wish To A Subscriber
A special good day to Herald subscriber Francis Mohr of Baker City.

BRIEFING

Downtown cleanup set to start Friday
The Baker City Downtown design committee is organizing a downtown cleanup Friday, April 24, starting at 9 a.m. Social distancing guidelines will be observed. Volunteers should meet at Royal Artisan at 1912 Main St. to get assignments and spread out from there. Baker City Downtown is also coordinating with the City of Baker to schedule street sweeping. Volunteers should bring gloves, brooms, dustpans, and any gardening and cleaning tools they have. Volunteers will be working individually or in small groups to ensure that social distancing protocols are maintained throughout the day. Work will include weeding, cleaning and planting tree wells, cleaning sidewalks, storefronts, benches, bike racks and sidewalk fixtures. Those wishing to volunteer can contact Kate Reid at 541-465-4547 or by messaging the Royal Artisan's Facebook page.

WEATHER

Today
60 / 31
Partly sunny with showers possible

Friday
63 / 33
Showers

Full forecast on the back of the B section.

The space below is for a postage label for issues that are mailed.

Business aid slow to flow

By Jayson Jacoby
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The torrent of federal dollars intended to help small businesses that have lost much, and in some cases all, of their revenue due to the coronavirus pandemic has amounted to barely a trickle in Baker County.

But local officials hope Congress will get the financial aid flowing soon.

Jeff Nelson, Baker County business adviser with Blue Mountain Community College's Small Business Development Center, said he been in contact with 73 local business owners who applied for money through either of two programs that are part of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act that President Donald Trump signed into law March 27.

Nelson said Tuesday that just

four of those 73 businesses have received money through either the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) or the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Emergency Advance.

Nelson declined to name the businesses. He said he would notify each that the Herald was interested in talking to them.

Nelson said the tally of 73 includes only the businesses he worked with — the actual number

of county businesses that applied for aid is no doubt higher, he said.

Nelson said he's optimistic that some of the Baker County businesses that have applied for a loan will actually be approved for assistance now that Congress is working on a bill that would replenish money in the PPP and some other financial aid programs.

See Aid / Page 3A

Local Nurseries Keep Gardeners Supplied During Pandemic



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

April and Rob Williamson shop for flowers Tuesday at Rock Garden Greenhouse in Baker City.

Blooming Business

By Lisa Britton
For the Baker City Herald

April Williamson filled her arms with flowers Tuesday morning as she took her turn browsing at Rock Garden Greenhouse in Baker City.

Owner Mark Servid opened the greenhouse April 3 at 2601 Oak St. To follow the CDC recommendation of social distancing to slow the spread of the coronavirus, customers must take a number and wait their turn.

"It's like going to the DMV," Servid said.

One carload at a time is allowed in the greenhouse to ensure safe physical distance.

He's stocked blooming perennials, annuals, hanging baskets, and has seen a demand for vegetables.

"Tomatoes sold really fast," he said.

At Oregon Trail Landscapes and Nursery, owner Lisa Constantine has added guidelines to ensure physical distance for the safety of customers. For instance, she asks that only five people are in the greenhouse at a time, and only one person at a time is

"It's been hard to get my watering done it's so busy."
— Lori Harris, Ace Nursery

allowed in the office and gift shop.

Then, after each transaction, she is disinfecting surfaces and doorknobs.

"We're taking all the precautions we're supposed to," she said.

She said she's been "pretty busy" since opening April 7, and she expects shipments of nursery stock in the coming weeks — although truck schedules are less predictable these days.

"The trucks are postponing," she said.

However, she does have quite a few trees and shrubs that have already survived the Eastern Oregon winter.

Constantine said she has ordered a little extra this spring in the anticipation that people staying home will be sprucing up their yards.

The other part of the business, Tony's Tree Service, is especially busy as people assess their properties.

"We're swamped," she said.

The social distancing guideline is easy with the tree service, she said, because most customers make contact by phone and then the work is all done outside. Even the nursery is receiving more calls and messages through Facebook, she said.

Oregon Trail Landscapes is located at 600 Elm St. Updates are posted on the Facebook page.

Lori Harris, who works at Ace Nursery, has seen a busier spring than usual.

"It's been hard to get my watering done it's so busy," she said.

The nursery, at 39103 Pocahontas Road, stocks perennials, annuals, vegetables, and just received a new load of trees.

Harris said she's disinfecting counters and pens after each transaction, as well as wiping down a customer's debit or credit card before handing it back.

Given the increase in business, she's hoping Baker City will be extra colorful this summer.

"I keep saying we better see some nice yards," Harris said.

County fears budget cuts

By Samantha O'Conner
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Shortfalls in Oregon's budget could have significant effects on Baker County's spending plan as well because state programs, including the gas tax and lottery, are major sources of county revenue, county commissioners said during their meeting Wednesday morning.

Commissioners discussed the situation with Christena Cook, the county's administrative services director.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said he received an email from the Association of Oregon Counties stating that Gov. Kate Brown had directed state departments to reduce spending by 8.5% for the remainder of the state's two-year budget cycle, which ends June 30, 2021.

Because June 30, 2020, is the halfway point of that cycle, reducing biennial spending by 8.5% is in effect a 17% reduction for the fiscal year that starts July 1, Bennett said. That's also when the county's fiscal year begins.

"That could have fairly phenomenal repercussions on us," Bennett said. "It brings another unknown to the table."

About two-thirds of the county's revenue derives from a state source, Bennett said.

Some of those sources will certainly shrink, including the gas tax, which supplies roughly 30% of the county road department's annual revenue of about \$6.3 million, according to the county's budget.

See County / Page 2A

Police Chief sees decline in some crimes

By Chris Collins
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Baker City Police are dealing with less crime as spring weather continues to brighten the days despite the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic hanging over the community.

But the slowdown is only

partly due to many people spending more time at home, giving criminals fewer chances to take advantage of unlocked doors or unguarded property.

Baker City Police Chief Ray Duman "wholeheartedly" attributes the recent decline in crimes such as robbery, burglary,

assaults and illegal possession of drugs and weapons specifically to the arrest, prosecution and conviction of several criminals who are now in prison or jail or under the supervision of the Parole and Probation Department.

Duman credits work by the Baker County Drug Task Force

for gathering information that led to the conviction of people he deems "nuisances of society" who have been linked to multiple crimes in the community over a period of several months dating to last year.

See Crime / Page 3A



TODAY Issue 158, 18 pages	Business..... 1B-3B Calendar..... 2A Classified..... 4B-6B	Comics..... 7B Community News..... 3A Crossword..... 4B & 6B	Dear Abby..... 8B Horoscope..... 4B & 6B Letters..... 4A	Lottery Results..... 2A News of Record..... 2A Obituaries..... 2A	Opinion..... 4A Sports..... 6A Weather..... 8B
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SATURDAY — RETURNING TO THE ELKHORNS FOR REPEAT PHOTOGRAPHY