LANDMARK

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machines, sewing, and manufacturing jobs back home to Wallowa County.

Hays said manufacturing is important in rural areas because it creates higher value than exporting raw materials or providing seasonal tourism.

"The idea is to take local barley and make beer; to take local clay and make pottery," Hays said.

Besides clothing, beer, and ceramics, Hays is building a workshop to make cutlery at M. Crow as well.

Hays has experience in manufacturing and a lifelong interest in making things from scratch.

He grew up in nearby Joseph, and fabricated his own toys and sewed with his grandmother. After high school, Hays attended art school at the University of Oregon and moved to New York City. Over years, he built BDDW, a company fabricating luxury furniture and ceramics. His Philadelphia factory employs 80 craftspeople, and he wants to create similar living-wage manufacturing jobs in Wallowa County.

It is difficult to create industry in a small town, far from an interstate, but Hays said he and his team are slowly building something.

"This is not a growth activated plan," he said. "It is about fixing the problems and educating people through our work."

While developing new industries is the long-term goal, the impetus for investing in Wallowa County was to save the M. Crow landmark from going under. M. Crow project manager, Michael Junkins, counts that a success.

"There are very expensive things in here but you can also buy the cheapest Coors Light in the county. You can buy our groceries or take your family out to eat on a $15 per hour job. There's something for everyone here," Junkins said.

Perhaps the mishmash of M. Crow's offerings is just another example of rural businesses trying to survive. Project manager Junkins said M. Crow is trying to appeal to both locals and tourists.

"We understand that if it isn't for the locals first, it won't succeed," Junkins said. "In the off season they keep the lights on."

Hays said the restaurant and convenience store aren't enough on their own which is why the store almost closed before.

"It is the customer that comes in from Portland and buys a shirt and some pants that can float the store day to day," Hays said.

Hays and Junkins say they are aware of the tension between selling milk for $2.99 and boots for $800. There is also tension between economic development and gentrification and between the urban and rural.

"I live both lives — New York and here. I can see the tension being in both worlds, and I can see the connections that can be made," Hays said.

There are also tensions about changing a 100-year-old institution.

"You're vulnerable to doing everything wrong. This is a special place but it is a fragile thing," Junkins said. He said being part of the community will keep the store on the right track. "The longer we're here, the more relationships we have, the better."

M. Crow was closed for a year of remodeling, but Junkins said locals are utilizing M. Crow as a meeting spot again for an after-work beer, a birthday party or the Lions Club meeting.

"Folks are also getting in the habit of buying groceries here again," he said.

Nella Mae Parks/EO Media Group

M. Crow & Co. in Lostine offers high-end plaid shirts like this at a price below what it would cost in new York City.

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