



Kaleb Lay/The Observer

Alegre Travel in downtown La Grande is going through a rebranding to become Find Your Why Travel. Owner Samantha LeBold said the change reflects why she got into the travel business.

Wildfires scorch logging companies

By Alex Paul
Capital Press

MARCOLA— Sweet Home native Lucas Hufford, 39, is a fourth-generation logger. His family owns Timberline Logging and although they weren't among the community's founders, the clan has been in the Sweet Home area long enough to claim a geographic namesake — Hufford Ridge east of town. His grandfather, Tom Hufford, drove log trucks until he was 88 years old and founded the popular Grampa Tom's Car Show that attracted hundreds of custom cars every summer for many years. His father, Ted Hufford, was a key figure in the timber wars of the 1990s.

Lucas Hufford has experienced the highs and lows of the profession all of his life.

But the 173,000-acre Holiday Farm Fire that started Labor Day evening and is contained but still burning threatened more than just Hufford's livelihood. The blaze also destroyed more than \$2 million in logging equipment while coming within a mile of the home he and his wife, Jessica, occupy a few miles south of the Linn-Lane county line off Marcola Road.

"I got a phone call about 5 a.m. Tuesday (Sept. 8) from Jeremy Norby of Guistina Resources," Hufford said. "He said, 'Don't be a hero! This thing is moving really fast.'"

Two hours later, Hufford learned that his logging equipment had been destroyed, except a 1,000-gallon fire truck, which he moved to a friend's property near Sweet Home.

Hufford said he was surprised by the call. Employees had contacted him on Labor Day and told him high winds were buffeting the area.

"It was completely calm here," Hufford said. "I took a video to show them how nice it was."

"I called Jess at work and told her to not come home because I knew the fire had to be close to our home," Hufford said. "I started putting important stuff like pictures, paperwork and guns into my truck because I didn't know if we would have anything

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A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

As travel industry suffers, local business adjusts image

By Kaleb Lay
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A La Grande-based travel agency and longtime local business is seeking to rebrand itself in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Alegre Travel, a brick-and-mortar mainstay in downtown La Grande, is set to become Find Your Why Travel.

"I've changed the name to reflect what travel means to me," said owner Samantha LeBold. "Traveling — it's taken me on a journey. I've learned a lot about myself, and that's something people who don't travel really don't get. ... I've found my 'why' and we'd love to help other people find theirs."

LeBold, who bought the business in 2015, said she is eager to help her customers "find their why." She also said it has proven difficult to find — and keep — those customers during the ongoing pandemic.

"COVID is horrible and what it's doing to our tourism industry is a nightmare. Every single trip we had on the books for 2021 was canceled. It's heartbreaking."

Samantha LeBold, owner of Alegre Travel in La Grande. The business is soon to become Find Your Why Travel

"COVID is horrible and what it's doing to our tourism industry is a nightmare," LeBold said. "Every single trip we had on the books for 2021 was canceled. It's heartbreaking."

Before the pandemic struck, travel was a multibillion-dollar industry in Oregon. According to a report prepared for the Oregon Tourism Commission in April, the statewide industry accounted for nearly \$13 billion in spending in 2019.

That same report found travel and tourism were particularly important to rural Oregonian communities, gener-

ating roughly \$18 million in tax revenue and 6,200 jobs in Eastern Oregon alone.

Then came 2020, and the coronavirus with it.

Greg Smith, director of the Small Business Development Center at Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, said while some essential businesses have thrived during the coronavirus pandemic, others are "hanging on by a thread."

"The impact is manifold in that you have real winners and real losers," Smith said. "[For] example, if you're running a liquor store you're doing extraordinarily well. On the

other hand, if you're dependent on foot traffic coming in and sitting down ... you've obviously seen negative impacts."

Smith, who also is a state representative, said struggling businesses have to adapt to new economic conditions.

"The economy in 2020 has changed and the way people do business has dramatically changed," he said. "The old economy is gone."

Smith added brick-and-mortar businesses may need to "reinvent themselves" and modernize, suggesting transitioning to an online business or communication model.

Find Your Why has made progress in that direction. According to LeBold, she's done a great deal more business via email during the pandemic.

While LeBold said her local clients sometimes travel to Alaska and Hawaii, her personal preference would be to

Community Kindness of Northeast Oregon expands

Nonprofit acquires space next door and opens online shop

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon, a nonprofit thrift store at 1315 Adams Ave., La Grande, is expanding its digital and physical footprint.

The store launched an online shopping option Monday, Oct. 26, and owners Liz and Grant Meyer are taking over the store space next door, formerly housed by Attitudes Dance Academy.

"We hope our customers enjoy and embrace this new option of thrift store shopping. We will continue to offer quality items to our customers both online and in our store," Grant Meyer said.

Liz Meyer said the physical expansion will give the store more space to sell some of its larger donations, including more furniture. The owners anticipate the expanded space to be open in a few weeks.

The second-hand store added an online purchasing option



Liz Meyer/ Contributed Photo

Grant Meyer, co-owner of Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon in downtown La Grande, works Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2020, renovating the space next door, which the nonprofit thrift store acquired.

after seeing the effect the coronavirus has had on online shopping.

"We decided to be sure and capitalize on this trend," Grant Meyer said. "We wanted to

increase sales without (having to) increase showroom space."

The items at ckthriftstore.com are exclusively available

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Forest Service considers regions for prescribed burns

Big burns under consideration for forests in Baker and Union counties

By Ronald Bond
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — More than 11,000 acres in the Wallowa Fire Zone and more than 20,000 total acres within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest are under consideration for a prescribed burn in the coming days and weeks should the weather allow it.

But it's unlikely that much land will end up seeing flames before snow flies.

"Between now and the snowfall when the conditions are appropriate," said Peter Fargo, public affairs officer with U.S. Forest Service, regarding the window for burns. "We're looking at fuel conditions, weather conditions, and this year in particular we're prioritizing burn units farther away from populated areas and downwind from populated areas."

The prescribed fires are a method of forest management used to clear underbrush, dead fuel or down fuel. A burn "allows fire to play its natural role on the landscape under controlled conditions," according to a press release.

Just five units in the Wallowa Fire Zone are under consideration for a prescribed burn, but

the combined size of those sectors is 11,481 acres, and each could see more than 1,500 acres burned. The largest prescribed areas are the Puderbaugh burn unit, south-east of Joseph, at 3,293 acres, and the Muddy Sled burn unit, north of Enterprise, at 2,367 acres.

About 5,000 acres are being considered for the Whitman Ranger District, largely based in Baker County, and another 4,000 could be burned in the Grande Ronde Fire District, most of which is in Union County.

Mark Moeller, assistant fire management officer for the Forest Service, said in an email the federal department is assigned a fuels-reduction target each year.

"This target includes all fuels reduction treatments, and does not specify how many acres of each type of treatment must be accomplished," he explained. "When the forest receives this target, we set goals for how many acres of each treatment we would like to accomplish in order to reach that target number."

So far, pile burns are all that have been conducted in the Wallowa Fire Zone, and that was

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