

State commits \$55M to help support Oregon businesses

Counties will decide how to distribute the money, which may be available within the next few weeks

The Observer
SALEM — Oregon is committing \$55 million in financial assistance to support Oregon businesses enduring the negative effects of COVID-19 restrictions. Gov. Kate Brown announced the funding Tuesday, Nov. 17, in a press release. The state will allocate the

\$55 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to counties, with each county receiving a base of \$500,000 plus a per capita allocation of the remainder of the funds, according to the release. Money will be allocated with “a priority for the hospitality industry, businesses impacted

by the freeze, small businesses, and women, Black, Indigenous, people of color and tribal-owned businesses,” the press release stated. The counties will be responsible for deciding how businesses apply to receive funds and communicating the application process to businesses.

The Governor’s Office also reported it anticipates funds will be distributed to counties within the next several weeks. Business owners who are interested in applying should contact their county for more information.

From hobby to home business

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer
LA GRANDE— La Grande resident Shawn Risteen was looking for a way to fill his days during his extra time at home after the pandemic began. His daughters bought him a wood turning lathe and he fell in love with making small projects in his garage. Now, he is selling his creations at Community Merchants in downtown La Grande and creating his own home business — 5:1 Turning.

“I was told if you don’t come out of the pandemic with a hobby, you’re doing something wrong,” Risteen said. The name of the business, he explained, comes from the fact he is the only male in the house with his four daughters and wife. For Risteen, working in the garage is an escape, but his wife and daughters love to see what he creates.

The decision to turn his hobby into a small home business came from Risteen’s experience as the president of La Grande Main Street Downtown and a member of the Union County Chamber of Commerce. He said he sees small businesses as vital to the local economy and wanted to help contribute.

“I could sell these things online for more, but I prefer to put it downtown and put money back into our community,” he said.

Risteen can make just about anything as long as it is round. So far he has made candlesticks, ornaments, jars, cups and bowls. He is experimenting with different types of woods and materials, including using resin and colored pencils.

“It is nice to watch something that might be thrown away turn into something beautiful,” Risteen said.

With no prior wood turning experience, Risteen has taught himself everything he knows through the internet. He said it is amazing the amount of information you can find to get started. There has been some trial and error, but he said he finds the whole process relaxing.

“One of my favorite parts is watching the wood spin, especially the colored wood,” Risteen said. “It is almost hypnotic, just to zone out and watch things spin.”



Shawn Risteen works at his lathe Sunday, Nov. 16, 2020, turning a wooden jar with purple resin at his home in La Grande.

It takes Risteen anywhere from 30 minutes to a couple of days to complete a piece, depending on the complexity and if he is using resin. He said he tries to make each piece look different to keep things original. Pieces are available in stock at Community Merchants and can be custom ordered.



A wood and resin container that Shawn Risteen of La Grande made sits complete Sunday, Nov. 16, 2020. Risteen took up turning wood on a lathe as a hobby to occupy his time after the COVID-19 pandemic began, and he is turning the hobby into a small business from his home.

Photos by Sabrina Thompson/The Observer

Oregon jobless rate drops 1%

Northeast Oregon following state trend

The Observer
SALEM — Oregon’s unemployment rate fell to 6.9% in October, down a full point from September’s rate of 7.9%, according to a press release from the Oregon Employment Department. The statewide unemployment rate closely mirrored the national unemployment rate, which fell from 7.9% to 6.9% from September to October, the state employment department reported.

Oregon added 14,200 jobs during October. Most of those employment gains were in construction, which added a seasonally adjusted 6,100 jobs and has seen strong employment growth over the past year. The professional services and hospitality industries each added 4,300 jobs.

Health care and social assistance also saw solid growth, as the Employment Department reported a gain of 3,700 jobs.

The unemployment rate in Northeast Oregon counties also has been trending down, according to the department’s most recent data for the region.

Unemployment in Union County fell to 6.9% for September from 7.6% in August. Baker County’s unemployment rate in that span dropped from 8.1% to 7.6%, and Wallowa County edged down from 7.9% to 7.7%.

In the release, the state employment department also noted the COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit the hospitality industry hard and job gains in the industry have slowed in the past four months. During the past year, employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector of hospitality and leisure have dropped 49%.

Job losses in October were most severe in government, where a decline of 7,400 jobs was reported. The Employment Department report stated a loss of 21,200 local government jobs in education, from grade school to college, a 15% drop, since October 2019.

Wallowa County favorite has new owners

By Bill Bradshaw
Wallowa County Chieftain
ENTERPRISE — An old favorite in Enterprise has new owners. Chris and Tina Borg-erding earlier this month took over the Back Country Little Store, 214 W. North St., Enterprise. The Borg-erdings replace former owners Tyson and Jessica Samples.

“They’ve been in the retail business a lot of years and just wanted a change,” Tina Borg-erding said.

Tina Borg-erding will be the primary operator of the convenience/grocery store, said her husband, Chris, who works as a contractor. She will run the store alongside daughter Katie Larson.

Tina Borg-erding said running a retail store is a new venture for her. She said she worked in the Enterprise store and one in Joseph when they were under a previous owner.

The convenience store is a popular stop for beer, soda, snacks, food for EBT (food stamps) customers and more. Unlike their predecessors, the new owners won’t sell hunting and fishing licenses



Tina Borg-erding, right, one of the new owners of the Back Country Little Store in Enterprise, jokes with customer Kevin Croghan, of Enterprise, on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2020. Borg-erding and husband, Chris, took over the business earlier this month.

and tags. Borg-erding said filling out that paperwork is too time consuming when the store is busy. Borg-erding also had a lawn-maintenance business for several years and has worked in bars and restaurants. She was

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Back Country Little Store, call 541-426-4824, email ourbackcountrystore@gmail.com or visit its Facebook page.

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Five Oregon businesses settle in COVID-19 consumer protection cases

The Observer
SALEM — Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum announced settlements with five Oregon companies for consumer protection violations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement came in a press release Tuesday, Nov. 17, and also reminded Oregon businesses that Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order banning excessive pricing of essential goods and services remains in effect.

Two convenience store chains, a Portland-based sock merchant, a travel business and a Bend skincare company each has to pay \$12,500-\$21,500, depending on the severity and number of violations.

The settlements, or Assurances of Voluntary Compliance, are the latest actions the Oregon Department of Justice has taken to address the unprecedented number of complaints

WHERE TO GO TO LEARN MORE OR MAKE A REPORT

For information on price gouging and other COVID-19 scams, visit www.oregonconsumer.gov/ COVID19, and for information on wildfire scams visit https://www.doj.state.or.us/consumer-protection/avoid_wildfire_scams/. If you have any questions, call the Oregon Attorney General’s Consumer Hotline at 877-877-9392.

Oregonians have reported during the pandemic, the press release stated. The price gouging hotline the AG’s office operates received more than 1,000 reports of price gouging.

Plaid Pantry paid the largest settlement, the AG’s office reported, for charging excessive prices for face masks.

The state justice department

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