

Small-business & Ag HAPPENINGS

Grants available to communities for water and waste infrastructure improvements

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development is accepting applications for grants through two programs to help rural communities develop locally based solutions and access financial resources to support water and waste infrastructure improvements.

Grants awarded through the Solid Waste Management Program may be used to provide technical assistance or training to improve the planning and management of solid waste systems in order to reduce pollution of water resources. Through the Water and Waste Disposal Technical Assistance and Training Grant Program, qualified private nonprofits can apply for grants to support the delivery of technical assistance and training to help rural communities identify and evaluate solutions to water problems and improve the operation and maintenance of water or waste disposal facilities.

Applications for both programs are due by 8:59 p.m. Dec. 31, and paper applications should be submitted to USDA Rural Development, ATTN: Community Programs, 1220 S.W. Third Ave., Suite 1801, Portland OR 97204. If you have questions, contact Ella Nichols, community programs specialist, at 503-414-3354.

State seeks applications for Specialty Crop Block Grants

SALEM — The Oregon Department of Agriculture is accepting proposals for project ideas as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program for 2021.

Approximately \$1.5 million is expected to be available to agriculture industry associations, producer groups, processors, commodity commissions, nonprofits, businesses and local government agencies in Oregon. Funding for Oregon's program is contingent upon federal funding for the program. Specialty crops are defined as commonly recognized fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and nursery crops. Oregon ranks in the top 10 nationwide in the production of such crops.

For the 2021 request for proposals, ODA has a single-phase process known as the Grant Proposal Application. ODA is requesting 15-page grant proposals from applicants describing their projects. Submissions should be turned in online and must be received by noon on Jan. 29, 2021.

ODA will offer online training and in-person assistance to applicants with the grant writing process. Details, including the time and date for online training, are on ODA's website: <https://oda.direct/SCBGP>.

— The Observer

Shop hop hits the target

First of its kind event supports local businesses while engaging customers

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Union County Chamber of Commerce wrapped up its inaugural shop hop the first week of December, and the chamber's executive director, Suzannah Moore-Hemann, said the event was a boon for both businesses and participants.

The chamber teamed up with businesses to organize the event to encourage local shopping Thursday, Dec. 3, through Saturday, Dec. 5. Participants used a Monopoly-like game card to collect stamps or signatures at the real-world locations of more than 30 Union County businesses and organizations, from Blue Mountain Outfitters and Fitzgerald Flowers, both in downtown La Grande, to Cat's Paw Farm in Union.

Players who visited every location then turned in their game cards to the chamber, which planned to pick three winners to each receive a gift basket full of goods and gift cards that local businesses donated.

Moore-Hemann said the chamber received about 100 game boards and more are coming in. After getting them all, she said, the chamber will draw the names of winners of the gift baskets. But instead of three winners, she said, there will be four.

Local businesses donated more than \$3,500 worth of goods for the gift baskets, she said, and there was so much the chamber made a fourth gift basket.

"So we get an extra person to surprise," she said.

Some shops also held their own raffles for gift baskets, she added, providing plenty of opportunity to win.

But the point of the event was to help local businesses, and Moore-Hemann said the plan worked. She said the Cove Drive-in and the Union Stoplight and other establishments reported more foot traffic and more customers than usual for the weekend, and La Grande establishments such as Brother Bear Cafe and Tap That Growlers reported new customers.

The original idea was to do the shop hops quarterly, Moore-Hemann said, which would mean the next event would be in February or March. But some business owners are being cautious about having one too soon, so the chamber is reevaluating when to hold the next shop hop.

This one proved enough of a hit to



Union County Chamber of Commerce/Contributed Photo

Gift baskets await the winners of the Union County Chamber of Commerce's December shop hop that promoted local shopping. Chamber executive director Suzannah Moore-Hemann said local businesses donated enough goods to increase the number of baskets from three to four.

keep it for next year, she said, and other dates could lend themselves to subsequent shop hops, such as Eastern Oregon University's Welcome Week, when new students arrive in September. She said that would provide an opportune time to show newcomers what La Grande and Union County have to offer.

She also said there also has been discussion on creating a shop hop focusing on local dining.

Local restaurants have so far weathered the storm of COVID-19 restrictions, she said, with only a few closures,

including Joe Beans in downtown La Grande. In that case, however, new buyers were at the ready and reopened as Brother Bear Cafe.

But with indoor dining limited by public health mandates and winter setting in — outdoor dining, obviously, is a non-starter in Northeast Oregon — the season could mean more local restaurants have to shut down. She said the chamber plans to meet this week to discuss spearheading some support for local restaurants.

"We're still trying to see what that looks like," Moore-Hemann said.

Support your fellow business owners for a brighter future



GREG SMITH
SBDC DIRECTOR

We've talked in previous articles about ways to improve sales during this wild rollercoaster ride we're on. Here are more ideas that may not only benefit your bottom line but help give another business a boost.

It begins by thinking outside

the box. Perhaps instead of seeing another business as a competitor, think of them as another potential customer and be creative about working together. Consider the following:

- Initiate an after-hours Zoom call inviting a variety of different business owners. Brainstorm on ways you can cross-promote and directly support each other. Much of what you can do won't cost a penny.
- Write a positive review or testimonial on social media. Talk about a great item they carry or

a specialty service they offer and post a picture on your Facebook page (personal and business). Ask them to do the same.

- Go live on Facebook. Share the name of your favorite restaurant and suggest a special menu item. Maybe send a gift card from your business to a standout server.
- Consider a mini "shop hop" in which customers are entered to win a gift basket featuring items from each establishment.
- Cross-market gift items. Perhaps your killer gourmet marinades and sauces are offered at

a specialty meat market across town.

Obviously, the goal is to generate more revenue for your business, but do not be afraid to work together.

It's not about giving a fellow entrepreneur a competitive edge. It's helping ensure that as many businesses in your community survive as possible.

Finally, most people are more committed than ever to shopping locally. Vibrant businesses working together have a better chance of anchoring customers.

Also, by showing your own support both as a business owner and private individual, you'll garner goodwill and help ensure the business community — which includes your own company — will have a brighter holiday and future.

Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center, La Grande. If you are seeking free, confidential business advising, call 541-962-1532 or email eousbdc@gmail.com.

Some reflections on Thanksgiving



SANDRA SORRELS
RESTAURANT OWNER

It was a very different Thanksgiving from any we have experienced before, and yet full of surprises and innovation.

We decided to do Thanksgiving dinner at our Ten Depot Street takeout operation after receiving several phone calls asking if we would be open. As we are all trying to limit social gatherings, we knew that many people would be alone or with just a few household members and that they would not want to cook a big turkey dinner.

So we decided that we could cook for 100 people and postpone our own Thanksgiving until Friday. That way our customers would be like one big family, sharing the same meal. It worked. We sold 25 dinners for four and 25 individual dinners for a total of 125. Many of our customers bought dinners for others.

Because cooking a good Thanksgiving dinner means getting the best ingredients to start with, our dinner was a community effort, sourcing the best local food available whenever possible. For this meal we had sweet onions from the

Boehnes, parsnips from Nella Mae's Farm, beets from Platz Farm, pumpkin and huckleberries from Anne Dickison, eggs from Val's Veggies, fresh green beans and other vegetables through Nature's Pantry and Jonathan apples (which my pie making aunt Arlene always swore made the best pies) from a tree in a friend's yard.

I learned to cook Thanksgiving dinner as a child, helping my two grandmothers and my mother. It was a joyous time. Most of the recipes that I use now are the ones I learned from them. Both of my grandmothers, friends before my parents met, were excellent cooks, born in 1901.

It gives me joy to think that their memory lives through the excellent food that our restaurant is able to share with the community. My grandmothers are also links to what we are experiencing currently, one losing a mother and the other a brother in the 1918 flu pandemic. I think about their experiences a lot.

So we managed to pull it off. Being a restaurateur is about innovation, seeing a need and filling it.

Who knows what the future of the restaurant world will be. What I do know is that when we emerge from this pandemic, it will be different.

Sandra Sorrels is the owner of Ten Depot Street Restaurant, La Grande.

Donations let Enchanted Forest open for another season

Oregon tourist destination makes it with online auctions and outpouring of support

By Jake Thomas
Salem Reporter via AP StoryShare

SALEM — Enchanted Forest will remain in business after raising over \$360,000 from fans of the amusement park just south of Salem.

In October, Enchanted Forest warned it would go bust after nearly a half century of visitors flocking to the park each summer to ride the Ice Mountain Bobsled Roller Coaster, brave the Haunted House or stroll through Tofteville Western Town.

Pandemic restrictions sharply reduced its number of visitors this year. To make up for lost revenue, the Tofte family, which owns and operates the park, set up a GoFundMe page seeking to raise \$500,000. The family explained that



Enchanted Forest/Contributed Photo

Visitors enter the mouth of a witch's head at Enchanted Forest near Salem. Roger Tofte, creator of the theme park, announced Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2020, the park raised enough money to stay in business.

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