

Local and regional business & ag Briefs

La Grande offering grants for drive-thru windows

LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande has set aside \$30,000 in grants to help the town's restaurants install windows for drive-thru or pickup.

"This is a program designed to help restaurants provide better access to customers now and in the future," City Manager Robert Strope, stated in a press release.

The grants can be for up to \$7,500 and are a one-to-one match. Restaurants in La Grande's Urban Renewal District are eligible. Those in the city's Historic District may need additional approval from the Landmarks Commission if they apply.

Applications are available at ignitemy-business.org/en/blog and will be considered until Dec. 31, 2020, or until funds run out.

Deschutes County files complaint over marijuana tax revenue

BEND — Deschutes County has filed a complaint against the state over marijuana tax revenue the county believes it should be paid, despite its moratorium on marijuana processing and growing facilities.

The county's legal department filed a complaint in state tax court against the Oregon Department of Revenue, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and Department of Administrative Services.

Marijuana tax revenue has not been paid to the county since the Deschutes County Commission placed a moratorium on approving new marijuana processing and producing facilities in August 2019. And in November, residents voted to uphold the moratorium.

But, a county only receives the tax revenue if it allows all licensed recreational marijuana activity to happen in the county, according to Mark Pettinger, a spokesperson for the Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

In response to the legal complaint, Pettinger said Friday, Dec. 18, the commission did not have a comment "because it's a legal matter."

Before the moratorium, the county was receiving about 4% of the revenue from the state's marijuana revenue fund that goes to counties. If the moratorium was not in place, the county would have received roughly \$514,000 from December 2019 to this September, said Richard Hoover, a spokesperson for the state Department of Revenue.

The county is asking the state to declare the statute does not preclude Deschutes County from receiving its disbursements from the state's marijuana tax revenue fund, given that the moratorium and the opt-out election did not impact existing marijuana-related facilities, according to the court filing.

The Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Revenue did not respond to requests for comment.

Willamette Valley farms on hook for back wages

SALEM — Three area farmers have been ordered to pay more than \$11,000 in back wages after denying paid sick leave to employees who were advised to self-quarantine following COVID-19 exposure.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division ordered Coleman Agriculture in Gervais to pay seven employees \$8,878; St. Joseph Orchard Inc. in McMinnville to pay four employees \$1,820 and J Farms LLC to pay one employee \$720, the Statesman Journal reported.

The paid sick leave is required by the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The Act gives tax credits to businesses with fewer than 500 employees for employee paid leave for the employee's health needs or to care for family members.

It wasn't immediately known if the farmers can appeal the order.

— EO Media Group

La Grande's hq expands

New space illustrates value of active store fronts

By Phil Wright
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande's downtown creative hub, hq, has expanded into an adjacent storefront.

The business at 112 Depot St. provides an event space and media studio. It also has been home to partners Cold Coffee Media and Eastern Oregon Film Festival. Chris Jennings, hq cofounder, said the two entities plus hq's administrative offices have moved into 116 Depot St., the former storefront for Goss Family Jewelers.

"We put in word if they ever relocated we would be interested," Jennings said.

The jewelry store closed operations in La Grande in November. Jennings said hq and its partner operations were quick to jump into the space.

"And make sure there wasn't another downed store front, especially next to us," he said.

But the move also brings Jennings full circle. Cold Coffee Media, a digital media and creative marketing firm, began at 116 Depot nearly 13 years ago. EOFF also originated from the space and has since grown into a nationally recognized event. Relocating into the site, Jennings said, is "in line with what I always wanted to do."

With the business and partner offices next door, Jennings said hq is making the event space available to individuals and small groups as a creative production studio. The space has a host of audio and video recording/streaming equipment, and a complete lighting package

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Phil Wright/The Observer

Chris Jennings places a new sign Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2020, for hq at 116 Depot St., La Grande, the former site of Goss Family Jewelers. Hq is moving some of its operations into the next door space.

Shop makes move to Joseph from Enterprise

New location has increased foot traffic, owner says

By Bill Bradshaw
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — An Enterprise clothing store has moved to Joseph and reopened with a new name

Thistle & Pine operated in Enterprise for about six months then moved to Joseph this past spring just as the COVID-19 pandemic was getting underway.

Now, it's Wild Sage Clothing.

"People didn't understand our name," owner Angela Train said. "It was too creative, I think."

Train, who leaves the day-to-day operation of the store to her daughters, Roni and Brianna Train, said the move was for a couple of reasons, which she called a "reset."

"The rent was cheaper in Joseph and there's more foot traffic, so we moved up there," she said.

Not a lot has changed except for the location, she said.

"We have the same type stuff as we did in Enterprise," Train said. "We have more tourists there so we're selling more trinkets and gifts, laundry soaps, dryer balls, pretty much everything. Right now, we're decorated for Christmas selling Christmas items."

Roni Train, who handles the bulk of the daily operations, agreed with her mom.

"We like it here a lot because we get a lot of foot traffic," said the 2000 Enterprise High School alumna. "In Enterprise, the customers were mainly locals. But here, we get more tourists."

She also works part time for Tiger Lights, an online business that sells LED



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Roni Train, right, proprietor at Wild Sage Clothing, shows an item to a prospective customer, Joyce Anliker, of Milton-Freewater, at the store's new location. Wild Sage moved to Joseph earlier this year from Enterprise and changed its name.

lights locally for farm equipment and off-road vehicles.

Wild Sage still has the high-end used clothing they sold in Enterprise, but they've added other items, as well.

"We have added lots of new stock since being in Joseph, such as eco-friendly items and additional home goods," Angela said. "For Christmas, we are making lots of our own ornaments and décor. Our gnomes are our favorite and featured in our windows right now. We also have tons of brand-new items now, which would make for good gifts this year. So though we still sell sec-

ond-hand, we have expanded our eco-friendly spectrum and added more souvenirs and home décor."

Angela, who works full time at Wallowa Valley Senior Living in Enterprise, said she's found the move encouraging, particularly from her business neighbors.

"They've been truly amazing," she said.

This month, the shop is open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday. That will change in January when the business goes to winter hours.

Check the store's Facebook page later this month for more information.

20 million Christmas trees come from this Oregon farm

Estacada's McKenzie Farms owner predicts a record-breaking sales year for wholesale Christmas trees

By Emily Lindstrand
Estacada News via AP StoryShare

ESTACADA — The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed many aspects of life, but a wholesale Christmas tree farm headquartered in Estacada is seeing the opposite effect.

Cubby Steinhart, co-owner of McKenzie Farms, estimated that the company's early-season Christmas tree sales are 20% to 40% ahead of where they were last year.

"The tree season has started early and stayed strong," he said. "It's been a fantastic early season."

In a typical year, McKenzie Farms ships between 22 million and 25 million trees to stores and lots across the United States and in Mexico. Steinhart predicted that number will significantly increase by the end of the 2020 season.

The company's biggest markets are in California, Florida, Georgia and Texas.

In Oregon, their trees are often sold at Home Depot, Lowe's and Costco.

McKenzie Farms is headquartered near Springfield Road in Estacada. The company has more than 100 farms from Estacada to Monroe, south of Corvallis. They plant between 35-40 million trees each year.

Steinhart attributed this year's steep increase in sales to people staying home during the pandemic — whether it's remaining

there day-to-day or not visiting relatives for the holidays to slow the spread of the virus.

"The biggest reasons are that people aren't going anywhere," he said. "Families aren't traveling for the holidays this year. If they travel normally, they're probably not going to buy a big tree, but now they're staying home. For people who don't normally travel, half of them haven't left their house. If you're in

your house, what better thing to make you cheerful than a Christmas tree?"

Earlier in the year, Steinhart watched the sales of seasonal commodities such as Fourth of July fireworks and pumpkins to predict what the holiday tree season might look like. He noted that sales of both items were "off the charts," which he also attributed to people remaining at home during the pandemic.

"If there's been one good

thing (about COVID-19), it's the best thing that's happened to garden businesses and seasonal items," he said.

During the pandemic shutdown, McKenzie Farms and similar operations were able to remain open because agriculture is classified as an essential business. Office employees have worked remotely when possible, and everyone working

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