

BOOST

Continued from Page 1A

Nichols said the committee had almost \$700,000 to distribute because two cities in the county, Halfway and Haines, sent their \$25,000 CARES Act allotments to the county, and Richland diverted \$7,600 of its \$25,000 to the county.

Nichols said he was committed to making sure that businesses in those cities received at least the amount that the cities had given to the county (*see list at right*).

The committee's awards across the county ranged from \$1,000 to \$45,000.

Six businesses received \$20,000, 14 will get \$15,000, and six will receive \$10,000.

Nichols said the committee based grant amounts on a variety of factors, including the applicants' revenue losses, whether they have received other pandemic aid such as Payroll Protection Program loans, and the number of employees.

The goal, Nichols said, was to maximize the economic benefits, countywide, of the federal dollars.

"We did that very well, I think," he said.

Bryan Tweit, the county's economic developer, said the county received more than 100 applications.

He said the committee reviewed applicants' tax records, profit and loss statements and other proprietary information so committee members could get a broad idea not only of how each business has suffered during the pandemic, but also how much each contributes to the local economy.

"We did dig down pretty deep, and that was the intent," Nichols said. "We needed to know the details to ensure that we get the most out of the money. We were trying to be as fair as we could be given the process we had to go through. Fair is in the eyes of the beholder."

"We're going to get some criticism for this, that's inevitable," he said. "I really feel like the committee did it the right way."

Committee members who voted on awarding grants were Nichols; Shawn Berry, who's leading the county's economic recovering team during the pandemic; Baker City Mayor Loran Joseph; and Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr.

Nichols said non-voting members of the committee, who also participated in discussions, are Tweit; Jeff Nelson of Blue Mountain Community College's Small Business Development Center; and Jason Yencopal, the county's emergency management director.

Nichols said Nelson and Tweit did much of the work in helping applicants through the process and securing the documents the committee used in reaching its decisions.

Barley Brown's/Sumpter Junction, \$45,000

The committee's largest grant, \$45,000, went to Windmill Enterprises, the local company owned by the Brown family that operates three businesses, Barley Brown's Brew Pub, Barley Brown's Tap House, and the Sumpter Junction restaurant.

Nichols said the amount of the grant reflects the company's multiple businesses, and that "their revenues were way down."

Tyler Brown, who runs the brew pub and tap house, said on Tuesday that he's grateful for the grant.

"It's great news," Brown said.

He said the Sumpter Junction restaurant has been closed throughout the pandemic because the layout of its booths made it impossible to comply with state guidelines and still have enough capacity to at least break even.

Both the brew pub and the tap house, meanwhile, have had significant revenue losses



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

The Eltrym Theatre, Baker City's only movie house, has been closed much of 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald File Photo

Luke Brown stacks cases of Pallet Jack IPA in April at Barley Brown's Brewery in downtown Baker City.

due to restrictions on the number of customers allowed and, since Dec. 3, a ban on indoor dining, Brown said.

"It's been a rough year," he said. "It's pretty dire. We're running at a loss every month."

To put the situation in perspective, Brown said the best month for his family's businesses in 2020 was February — which typically is either the slowest month or the second-slowest, behind only January.

"This has been a whole year of the worst January and February you could pile back to back," Brown said.

Brown said he hopes the money will keep his family's businesses going. He's hoping to receive a second Payroll Protection Program loan through the second relief package pending in Congress.

Brown said the company received a loan this spring. Although the program is designed so that qualifying businesses don't have to repay the loan, he said he doesn't yet know whether his family's businesses will qualify to have its loan forgiven.

Brown said the brew pub and tap house operated at a loss due to the reduced capacity required by the state.

The ban on indoor dining in effect for almost a month has been "devastating," he said.

The brew pub, like many local restaurants, has been serving takeout meals, but Brown said Barley Brown's is not designed for that.

"We're not set up to be a fast food, takeout restaurant," he said.

Brown said the company's workforce has been about 25% to 30% of normal this year.

Barley Brown's brewery has suffered not only due to restrictions at the brew pub and tap house, he said.

Brown said earlier this year that he sells about 70% of the brewery's beer to distributors that deliver it to bars and restaurants west of the Cascades.

With those customers being

either closed, or with limited occupancy, for much of 2020, that market has all but evaporated. That forced Brown to hire an Idaho firm to bring its mobile beer-canning operation to Baker City this year. Selling canned beer hasn't turned a profit, Brown said, but it at least avoided having to dump his brew, which, unlike wine doesn't improve with age, down the drain.

Eltrym Theatre, \$40,000

Movie theaters usually are open 365 days a year.

Since buying the Eltrym Theatre in Baker City in 2008, Terry McQuisten has closed only one day due to wintry road conditions she deemed dangerous for her staff.

"Theaters don't close. We're contractually obligated to be open," she said.

Except in 2020. Due to state-mandated restrictions, the Eltrym closed in mid-March. Theaters were allowed to reopen in August, but studios were not releasing new movies.

McQuisten re-opened the Eltrym on Sept. 18 with limited seating to ensure physical distancing, and moviegoers were required to wear masks when not eating or drinking. Other precautions included installing air scrubbers on the HVAC system and increased disinfecting practices.

"It wasn't busy, but we had a lot of repeat business," she said. "People were super supportive."

Then a statewide freeze closed theaters again Nov. 14.

The Eltrym remains closed. In a typical year, McQuisten said movies can bring in as many as 500 people a day in the second half of December.

Plus, she said it's just a fun atmosphere from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. "For a theater owner, it's the best time of year," McQuisten said.

Although not allowed to open, the theater still has

"It's been a pretty rough year. We're running at a loss every month."

— **Tyler Brown, owner, Barley Brown's Brew Pub and Tap House**

expenses, such as utilities and loan payments.

Besides being grateful for the \$40,000 grant in federal CARES Act money from a county committee, McQuisten said she was happy to learn that 66 other businesses and organizations received grants.

"I've been worried about what we're going to lose," McQuisten said.

Nichols said pandemic restrictions have "devastated" the Eltrym, and he was pleased the committee awarded \$40,000 to the business, which is Baker City's only movie theater.

"I'd hate to lose that," Nichols said of the Eltrym. "I don't think we'd ever get another one."

Geiser Grand Hotel, \$20,000

Barbara Sidway, who owns the historic, 131-year-old hotel on Main Street in Baker City, said she will use the grant to offset payroll costs.

Sidway told KATU News, the ABC TV affiliate in Portland, recently that the business could lose \$1 million in revenue this year.

She said Wednesday that she has been trying to keep her staff busy with projects such as refinishing and reupholstering 150 antique chairs.

D&J Taco Shop, \$15,000

Jamie Kassien always worries about January and February, when business slows at D&J Taco Shop, which he owns with David Kassien.

"This time of year is already terrifying when we don't have a pandemic," Jamie said.

And that slowdown follows a summer of lost income from catering events that were cancelled.

"We lost weddings, graduations," Jamie said. "Usually in the summer we are booked every weekend for events."

He described the \$15,000 grant from the county committee as a "lifesaver."

"We can keep our staff and not cut hours," he said. "It'll keep us above water."

The taco shop was restricted to takeout in the spring, and again starting on Nov. 14.

Although takeout business has been slower than it was during the spring, Jamie is thankful for those who still stop in for a meal.

"I can't thank our friends and community enough," he said.

Kicks Sportswear, \$15,000

Jayne Skidgel, owner of the shop on Main Street in Baker City, said she's trying to be optimistic not only about her business but about her fellow merchants.

"Being a business owner looking at other businesses, I think everybody can say it's

CARES Act grant recipients

- Barley Brown's, \$45,000
- Eltrym Theatre, \$40,000
- Haines Steak House, \$25,000
- Latitude 45 Grill, \$25,000
- Wild Bill's (Halfway), \$25,000
- Charlie's Deli, \$20,000
- Frontier Express, \$20,000
- Geiser Grand Hotel, \$20,000
- Inland Cafe, \$20,000
- Lefty's Tap House, \$20,000
- The Main Event, \$20,000
- AJ's Corner Brick Bar and Grill, \$15,000
- Carole's Mad Dog Restaurant and Saloon (Sumpter), \$15,000
- D&J Taco Shop, \$15,000
- Delicioso Mexican restaurant, \$15,000
- Eagle Cap Grill, \$15,000
- Ed's Idle Hour LLC, \$15,000
- El Erradero, \$15,000
- Glacier 45, \$15,000
- Kick's Sportswear, \$15,000
- Paizano's Pizza, \$15,000
- Ryder Brothers Stationery Store, \$15,000
- Sara's Richland Cafe, \$15,000
- Shorthorn Restaurant and Lounge (Richland), \$15,000
- The Little Bagel Shop, \$15,000
- Bridge Street Inn, \$10,000
- Copper Belt Wines, \$10,000
- The Depot Inn (Sumpter), \$10,000
- The Ison House, \$10,000
- The Lone Pine Cafe, \$10,000
- The Sycamore Tree, \$10,000
- Churchill Baker, \$8,000
- Haines Sell-Rite store, \$7,500
- Hells Canyon Bed and Breakfast, \$7,500
- Go Wild, \$5,047
- Affirmative Touch, \$5,000
- April's Daycare, \$5,000
- Baker City Chiropractic Clinic, \$5,000
- Cody's General Store, \$5,000
- Copy, Ship and Mail, \$5,000
- Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, \$5,000
- Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre, \$5,000
- Essentially Danika, \$5,000
- Lavish Salon and Day Spa, \$5,000
- Marilyn's Music Plus, \$5,000
- mind, body, yoga LLC, \$5,000
- No. 1911, \$5,000
- Sunkissed Salon, \$5,000
- The Blue Door Inn, \$5,000
- The Cheese Fairy, \$5,000
- The Last Resort, \$5,000
- Treasure Every Stitch, \$5,000
- YMCA, \$5,000
- Ashley's PlayCare, \$3,000
- Beloved Tattoo, \$3,000
- Tanglez & Toez, \$3,000
- The Kids Closet, \$3,000
- Liberty Motorsports, \$2,500
- On Point Labs, \$2,500
- Thornton Direct Primary Care, \$2,500
- Another Round Resale, \$2,000
- Honey's Bunkhouse, \$2,000
- Kellie Blair, \$2,000
- Oregon Sign Company, \$2,000
- Dennis Beyer Agency, \$1,000
- RRT Auto Anything, \$1,000
- Urban Pine Properties, \$1,000

been heartbreaking to watch other businesses in town struggling and they can't keep the doors open," Skidgel said. "I guess it's a bittersweet kind of thing, we've been able to keep our doors open, we only closed for a month and a half at the very beginning. It is hard to watch and there will be some businesses that won't come out of this."

Skidgel said she's grateful to receive the money.

"It will help us keep our doors open; in reality everybody has those fixed expenses every month that you have to pay," she said. "If you don't have the income coming in, then it's really hard and you start pulling from your personal and this or that. I am very very grateful that the county was able to get that."

Skidgel said she's concerned that January and February, which are typically slow months, will be even more sluggish.

Her business also has suffered from the absence of high school sports, which could resume in late February.

"I'm praying something is going to change and we are going to get sports back at some point," Skidgel said.

She said she was thankful for the support from local residents during the holiday season.

"Between Thanksgiving and Christmas was just unbelievable with us," Skidgel said. "It was so nice to see familiar faces and customers coming in and they are trying to do their best, and buying local and supporting local."

Churchill School, \$8,000

Churchill School often saw

pre-pandemic crowds at least once a week, whether for a concert, trivia night, or an evening of line dancing.

"It's fun to have a space where people can gather and enjoy something," said Brian Vegter, who owns Churchill, a former elementary school in Baker City, with his wife, Corrine.

That all stopped in March. Brian isn't sure when indoor events will again be allowed.

"If we can't do any ticketed events for a year, how can we survive?" he said.

The bills still arrive, despite the lack of events.

Some of \$8,000 grant, he said, will be used to bring musicians to Baker City to record albums and have livestreamed concerts.

"It allows us to stay relevant," Brian said. "And musicians are some of the hardest hit. This allows them to create something they can actually sell. A lot of people have spent the lockdowns making new material."

Plus, he said this will keep Churchill connected to musicians from around the country.

"It's a benefit to build these relationships when we're closed because when we open, we can have these great musicians back," he said.

In the meantime, the Vegters are adapting. For instance, Brian uploads images of each month's art show so they can be viewed from home.

They also plan to host more drive-in movies this summer. To stay updated on Churchill events, visit www.churchill-baker.com.