



TOP: Artwork adorns the wall of the newly renovated and modernized restaurant section of Raul's Taqueria in La Grande.

RIGHT: Arturo Escamilla, co-owner of Raul's Taqueria, pauses for a photo in the newly added section of the restaurant on Tuesday, June 1, 2021. Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Raul's Taqueria to double in size with addition of space formerly occupied by Looking Glass Books

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A promising new chapter in the story of Raul's Taqueria is about to begin in space that once housed a bookstore.

The popular Mexican restaurant will soon double in size after the renovation of 1,000 square feet of space adjacent to it is complete. The restaurant's new addition is set to open sometime next week.

"We are very, very excited," said Arturo Escamilla, co-owner of Raul's Taqueria with his father-in-law, Raul Correa.

The addition, which previously housed Looking Glass Books, will feature a bar with a porcelain tile surface and seating for 43 customers. Its features also include five televisions and ceramic tile floors.

The bar will serve seven



varieties of draft beer, including Modelo, Widmer, Dos Equis XX, Coors Light, Irish Death and Barley Brown's IPA. The varieties include a seventh which will be changed depending on the season.

The bar will also feature other drinks, including gin, rum, scotch, tequila, Irish whiskey and Canadian whiskey.

"We hope to have the largest selection of alcoholic drinks in La Grande," Escamilla said.

The renovation work, which started in April of 2020, will be paid for with the assistance of a \$21,072 grant from the city of La Grande's Urban Renewal Call for Projects program.

"That will be a tremendous help," Escamilla said.

Funds from the grant will also be used to help pay for

extensive renovation work that has been completed at Raul's current space, including new paint, new back door, replacing styrofoam signs with ones with metal lettering and adding lettering over the entrance.

The renovation of the restaurant's old and new space has been a time-consuming and sometimes grueling process.

"We did everything ourselves except for the electrical and plumbing work," Escamilla said.

Additions to be made later include the installation of a digital jukebox. People with the proper smartphone app will be able to select from thousands of songs they will be able to play without leaving their seats.

Escamilla and Correa have

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Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Element owner Leah Johnson shows one of her encaustic paintings that shows a view of the Wallowa Mountains from the Zumwalt Prairie on Thursday, May 27, 2021, in her new shop in Joseph.

In her 'Element'

Former banker, Leah Johnson, opens art shop opens in former jewelry store

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Leah Johnson is now in her Element: That's the name of the art studio and gift shop she opened recently in downtown Joseph.

"I like the simplicity of the word and the meaning — a part of something, a part of me, part of the community and science. I've always loved the periodic table of the elements, how it looks, how each element is made of atoms, specific parts," she said in a prepared statement. "It is a reference to me respecting more creative and artistic parts of myself with this new business."

After working for 17 years at Community Bank in Joseph — the past 12 as marketing manager — the Joseph native decided to go out on her own with her true passion: art.

"I also had been learning about the classical elements, earth, water, air and fire. I'm

between an earth and a fire sign and my artwork uses earth (with wax, resin and pigment) and then is fused with fire or heat. ... So the name Element encompasses all the reasons I was going into the business and combining these things together."

Johnson's artistic medium fits well with her statement.

"I do encaustic painting and it's wax and resin, beeswax and tree resin are used to make the encaustic medium," she told the Chieftain Thursday, May 27. "You melt it and apply it on a flat surface. You can use oil paints to paint on your encaustic medium doing layers and build up some color as you go. It's really fun. You have to fuse the layers together to make sure they adhere to the previous layers. You fuse it with a heat gun or a blowtorch."

After obtaining her college degrees in art and painting, she and husband, James Johnson, returned to Wallowa County. He owns Joseph Hardware across the street.

"When we moved back here, it was just a great job available and so I just stuck with (the bank) and

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Rondon appointed director of Oregon Integrated Pest Management Center

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

HERMISTON — When Silvia Rondon first arrived in Hermiston in 2006, local farmers were struggling with a surge of potato tuber moths damaging their crop.

Rondon, a professor and entomologist at Oregon State University's Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, was just establishing her program focused on integrated pest management for irrigated row crops in the Columbia Basin.

After studying the pernicious insect, Rondon and her team learned the moth's larvae prefer to feed on the leaves of young potato plants. Rather than spraying seven or eight pesticide applications throughout the growing season, farmers could spray once or twice closer to harvest before the foliage shrivels and dies.

"That is the critical time," Rondon said. "Once the foliage, which is the preferred feeding host of the pest, is gone, that's when they start attacking the tubers."

Over the years, Rondon has helped growers in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington battle

a variety of infestations, including potato psyllid, potato beetle and lygus bugs.

Her experience has led Rondon to a new position as director of OSU's Integrated Pest Management Center, helping farmers across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest improve their production.

The Integrated Pest Management Center — formerly known as the Integrated Plant Protection Center — is based at OSU's main campus in Corvallis, though Rondon said she will remain in Hermiston for the time being and continue to oversee the station's entomology program.

Rondon was selected by an 11-person search committee consisting of members from OSU, the state Department of Agriculture and industry groups. Her appointment is effective July 1.

"I am super excited about this position, and the new challenge ahead of me," Rondon said. "I think my expertise fits really well."

Integrated pest management is about more than

pesticides. It takes into account things like crop selection, mechanical controls, biological agents such as harnessing beneficial insects and regular field monitoring. These practices work in tandem to keep pest populations at manageable levels.

The center has four signature projects, including pesticide risk management and safety education and pest and weather modeling. The fourth project is working with researchers and growers to put integrated pest management plans into action.

Rondon said she is looking forward to expanding the center's influence, and improving communication within those networks.

"A lot of people do fantastic work within their own niches," she said. "Better communication will really connect the dots."

In an email announcing Rondon's appointment, Alan Sams, dean of the OSU College of Agricultural Sciences, said she will help to strengthen the center, "enhancing our strategic goal to help our

industries compete in their markets, domestically and globally."

Being based in Hermiston has given Rondon a broad grounding. The Columbia Basin, with its loamy soil and climate consisting of hot days and cool nights, grows more than 200 irrigated crops, each of which poses its own challenges and opportunities.

Umatilla County leads the state in production of vegetables, melons and potatoes, according to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture, with sales topping \$111 million.

"My specific program here in Hermiston will continue to be driven by the needs of local growers," Rondon said. "I am extremely appreciative for all the support they have given me."

While her background is in entomology, Rondon knows she has more to learn in her new role. Integrated pest management involves not only insects, but plant pathology and weed and livestock management, she said.

"The other pieces have not really been part of my job," she said. "What I want to do is to keep learning."



Rondon



Hoey

Lower production will hit Oregon Wheat Commission budget

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

SALEM — The Oregon Wheat Commission expects decreased production due to drought conditions.

That will mean less assessment revenue, Oregon Wheat CEO Amanda Hoey told the Capital Press.

Growers pay an assessment of 5 cents per bushel of wheat and \$1 per ton of barley.

Commission board members recently finalized their budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Board members approved a budget of \$2.19 million, adding \$3,000 to the approved budget from the year before.

"In April 2020 we were facing crop uncertainties in relation to dry weather so had projected lowered assessment revenue at that time," Hoey said. "With the beneficial rains that arrived in May 2020, our actual revenues were much higher than budgeted."

The increased revenue and cost savings in reductions in personnel and travel due to the pandemic

allowed to commission to be in a place for the current budget year to fund all base research, marketing and grower service projects; increase funding to cover beneficial projects; and add to its carryover revenue, Hoey said.

"That carryover revenue is important for a year like the one upcoming, wherein we anticipate that the budgeted reduction in revenue will materialize," she said. "We have not seen those timely rains in the same way this year that we did last year."

Hoey expects to have nearly \$6.5 million in available funds, with expenditures of \$2.4 million.

With the anticipated lower production, Hoey said, the commission won't add funds into savings.

"We project we will end the upcoming year with a carryover savings of about \$4 million, which keeps the commission in a stable financial position able to meet its commitments over the long term," she said.

Domestic travel is expected to return to near

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