

J’s Place survives online competition

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Strumming and tinkering right along, Jay Connolly, owner of J’s Place in Enterprise, considers himself a survivor.

He’s survived the coronavirus pandemic and devastating competition from online marketers. He’s even survived several moves of his store’s location, although he’s always remained in Enterprise.

“I’ve been all over the place,” he said. “Actually, I’ve had J’s Place as a business since 1996.”

Connolly, who primarily sells guitars, computers and related items, took last year off, which happened to coincide with the pandemic. He moved from his former location on Main Street to the corner of NW First and North streets about six months ago.

“It wasn’t intended to be that way,” he said, “but that’s the way it worked out.”

But the store may not have been noticed by many.

“I didn’t have a sign on there for quite a while,” Connolly said.

Guitars may be the most noticeable item when one walks into the store. He keeps a few guitars — both electric and acoustic



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Jay Connolly, owner of J’s Place in Enterprise, right, answers questions for Graham Adams about Adams’ electric guitar Tuesday, June 22, 2021. Connolly sells a variety of guitars, computers and related equipment. J’s Place recently relocated to the corner of NW First and North streets.

— in stock, as well as guitar strings and other accessories.

“I usually have just a couple guitars in stock,” he said. “I sell lots of strings and things like that. I do order PA (public address) equipment — sound systems and things like that.”

The majority of Connolly’s business is repairing and selling computers. He mostly works on PCs but also does Macs. That’s

where most of his business is — ordering and working on items for customers.

He doesn’t have a lot of local competition these days, as several computer stores in the county were driven out of business in the past decade by online merchants.

“Actually, the competition is from online,” he said. “When I started, there were (several other shops in the county), but

online just killed it off.”

But the decrease in competition had nothing to do with last year’s pandemic.

“When these guys (the online stores) started getting really popular, that’s when it changed,” he said. “Most of us still bought parts and built computers, but that changed too.”

But Connolly still finds business good and he appreciates the support of

J’S PLACE
Where: 103 SW First St., Enterprise
Email: jsplace@oregontrail.net
Phone: 541-263-0225
Online: Currently updating website

the community.

“It’s really good,” he said. “I’d taken a year off and so, coming back, more and more of my old customers are coming in and I’ve really enjoyed that. I missed them.”

Connolly is sole owner of the store and the principal operator. His wife, Jennifer Hawkins-Connolly, is an art teacher at Joseph Charter School. Together they have two sons, Joshua, 27, and

Gabriel, 18. Both live here, and Josh works part time in his dad’s store.

As a local merchant, Connolly said the community feeling is invaluable.

“The community here has been so good to me. I want to thank the community for the support they’ve given,” he said. “I can’t say enough about Wallowa County. We live in a really great place.”

And he’s gratified to be back in business.

“After the break, it’s good to be back and great to see my old friends,” he said. “This location is nice and busy because you see stuff, and I think it’s pretty easy to find. I plan on staying here until I retire because that’s only going to be four years.”



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Jay Connolly, owner of J’s Place in Enterprise, looks over a PC he’s been working on Tuesday, June 22, 2021. Connolly sells a variety of guitars, computers and related equipment and repairs them too.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Liz Meyer, who runs the nonprofit Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon with her husband, Grant Meyer, pauses for a photo in the foyer of the Henry Building on Friday, June 18, 2021, which houses the organization’s thrift store. Meyer, who is from England, has decorated the foyer, the exterior and parts of the thrift store with British flair as a way of promoting the business and getting people interested.

KINDNESS

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“Nonprofit was a big thing for me,” she said. “My heart is really in it for my community. I don’t take a penny for this. I don’t pay myself for this. Some people think I’m crazy, some people think I’m nuts. But there’s a need, and I want to be a part of helping somebody out.”

Among those needs are clothing for individuals coming out of jail or who need clothes for a job interview, according to the Meyers, but it varies based on what comes through the door; at one point, the thrift store helped cover travel expenses of two young

men who were stranded in La Grande and sent them back home to their families, sending one as far as New York. The nonprofit also donates fidget blankets to Wildflower Lodge Assisted Living & Memory Care Community.

The blankets, which are crafted by volunteers, have various small sensory and tangible objects attached to them. It’s designed to help those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or dementia by focusing their attention.

“It helps calm them down when they’re having anxiety attacks and things like that,” said Liz Meyer. “My grandmother had Alzheimer’s — I was very close to her — and she passed away when I was

21, 22. It’s just something I carried with me in my mind. I have a truly high respect for the elderly in the community. I have a desire and a need to help people.”

At the heart of it, that’s what Community Kindness of Eastern Oregon is about, according to the Meyers — helping people in need, whether that means donating clothes or offering up a daily hug to elderly patrons who ask for it. Giving back is what fuels Liz Meyer, not a paycheck.

“People just want to be cared for and loved,” she said. “There’s too much in the world going on and I think we forget the things that matter most: a minute to chat, a minute to care.”

APPLE

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save and share these lost apples. That’s who we are.”

So why find and preserve apples when there already are numerous varieties out there today?

“The old ones that we are looking for, we don’t know what they have to offer,” Cooper said. “There were 12,000 or 14,000 at the turn of 1900. You never know what that apple can offer to you. Can it prosper in a dry climate? A wet climate? Can it withstand disease (more readily)?”

When the conservancy receives an apple specimen, as it did with the Kay, it’s analyzed by experts who compare its traits to what is in the conservancy’s database, which includes U.S. Department of Agriculture notes on apples dating back more than 100 years.

“We look at it. We have a big database on the computer of looking at others it is similar to. We break them down into 30 or 40 different categories,” Cooper said.

Some of those categories, she said, include when in the season it grows, whether it has a sweet or tart taste, its shape, and much more.

“There are so many aspects of the apples before you say, ‘It fits in this category,’” she said.

One of the benefits the conservancy had in identifying the Kay was it was sent to the USDA in 1898, where a watercolor painting of it was done.

“It’s much better if

you can look at it and find some detail — and with the Kay this is the case,” Cooper said.

The more details that can be matched up with records the better the chance the conservancy can accurately identify the fruit.

While you can’t be absolutely certain on an ID, she said “we’re pretty confident,” the lost apple found in Flora is, indeed, a Kay.

The next step is to attempt to graft the tree to preserve it and, in years to come, pass the tree to others.

Benscoter will go back to Flora later this year to take scions — shoots from a tree — from the Kay tree back to the conservancy so it can graft them in and, hopefully, produce more scions and give the lost apple another lease on life.

Benscoter said he’ll take some grafts for the the Lost Apple Project too.

“I generally take some other grafts and graft it to my trees and start growing it on my trees,” he said. “That is especially important for trees that aren’t really in a good location, where they don’t get enough water.”

Long said some cross-

breeding of the Kay with other apple varieties could also lead to great results, which is another reason to keep these lost apples around.

“You want to preserve something like the Kay (for) its genetic variability,” he said. “You want to cross it with something and you may get something very good.”

Long’s work isn’t stopping with the Kay rediscovery.

“I have friends who live in Flora. They are reaching out to all the people in the area who have an orchard or have a tree in their yard that has been there since 1938 (for example), and we’ll be getting in touch with those people,” he said. “There may be many things like the Kay that are lost and resurface there.”

Anyone interested can contact Long at roger-blong@gmail.com. Those who want to learn more about TWC can visit www.temperateorchardconservancy.org, or for LAP, they can contact Benscoter at dbens23@gmail.com.

“If they have some weird old apple tree in their front yard and they don’t know what it is,” Long said, “we would like to talk to them.”

RETIREMENT

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been withdrawn but wasn’t.

Of course, just because she has to withdraw the money and pay taxes on it does not mean she has to cave to the family member. The withdrawals are hers to spend, invest, share or save as she wishes.

Dear Liz: My husband lost his job and we are on COBRA continuation coverage for our health insurance. We won’t have to pay the premiums through Sept. 30, thanks to the American Rescue Plan, which passed in March. Is there anything we can take advantage of Oct. 1 if my husband is not back to work?

I understand that there’s a special enrollment period right now for Affordable Care Act coverage that ends Aug. 15. My husband’s 18 months of COBRA coverage ends in December but it’s very expensive and we’d like something cheaper.

Answer: The two of you should be allowed to switch to an Affordable Care Act policy once your free COBRA coverage ends.

COBRA allows people to extend their workplace

health insurance for up to 18 months after losing their job, but as you’ve noted, the costs can be high. COBRA coverage requires paying the entire premium that was once subsidized by the employer, plus an administrative fee. ACA policies, by contrast, are typically subsidized with tax credits that make the coverage more affordable.

The American Rescue Plan requires employers to pay COBRA premiums for eligible former employees for April through September. The employers will be reimbursed through a tax credit. (The subsidy may last fewer than

six months if someone’s COBRA eligibility ends before September, or if they become eligible for group coverage through their job or their spouse’s job.) When the premium-free coverage ends, your husband would be qualified for a special enrollment period that allows him to switch to an Affordable Care Act policy.

Not only that, but anyone who is unemployed at any point during 2021 will qualify for a premium-free comprehensive policy through the ACA for the rest of the year. HealthCare.gov will have details later this month.

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