



SUZANNAH MOORE-HEMANN
CHAMBER CHAT

Nothing says 'summer' quite like ... elephant ears

You know summer is here when you see the brightly colored flyers hanging in store windows of this event or that event. You don all the sunscreen you can find, grab the cash and head over. You see the cars lining the streets and have a nostalgia wash over you as you gear up for the summer festivals you've been to for so many years. You visit with people you haven't seen in ages while you buy yet another lump of cotton candy. The smell of corndogs, burgers and — yes, my favorite — elephant ears hangs in the air, for hours after the last vendors close their shops.

Sure, if you're like me, you've been to all of these events a million times before. But, go again. Explore each festivity with new eyes: look for the familiar faces to catch up with; explore the shop you haven't checked out for a while; go ahead and just grab the junk food (I couldn't say it better than Karin at The Local when she said, "Hey, it's okay to have ice cream before coffee!").

You live here. You work here. You play here. So, take the opportunity to re-explore the towns, shops, vendors — the places that make Union County "home." The Grassroots Festival of Union, the Union County Fair, Elgin's Riverfest, Cove's Cherry Fair and North Powder's Huckleberry Festival — and all the other events that make summer "summer" in Union County have a way of bringing out the youthful nostalgia in us.

At this point, I'm not running between antique cars or playing tag with friends — and, yes, I might stretch a little more frequently to keep my back from stiffening up — but I still get the flutter of excitement as I look from booth to booth, exploring the wonderful offerings, hunting for treasures. Sure, I gravitate toward measuring spoons, tea towels, tools and home decor much more than I ever remember doing years ago, but I'll be the first to admit

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Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Mark Crowder, owner of Rain Barrel Ciderworks in Baker City, said shifting from selling his products in kegs to bottling the cider has helped his business survive the pandemic.

A new avenue for sales

Owner of Rain Barrel Ciderworks said bottling helped keep his cidery afloat

By **COREY KIRK**
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — Like most other business owners over the past 18 months, Mark Crowder has felt the effects of the pandemic. And Crowder, who

is Baker County's only commercial hard cider maker, is ready to move toward a more normal situation.

Crowder, who started Rain Barrel Ciderworks in 2019 in Baker City, said one of the challenges during the pan-

demic has been to preserve the quality of his perishable product.

"Just trying to keep the cider from spoiling because I keep it in storage," Crowder said. "I've been keeping them in these totes which I ferment them

in, but to avoid oxidation I had to switch to a new storage means, and that allowed me to keep the cider from getting oxidized and going bad so I can keep it for several months longer than I would normally like to keep it before releasing. So I found ways to work around it, basically."

With restaurants and bars closed or severely restricted for much of 2020 and into 2021, Rain Barrel Ciderworks suffered due to the lack of wholesale orders.

So Crowder, who previously had sold most of his cider in kegs, decided to focus on bottling his product to broaden his retail sales options.

"I only had done a couple of limited bottlings of two of my ciders so far," he said.

He had to buy some new equipment to facilitate the bottling.

Although it's been a tough year and a half, Crowder, who moved to Baker City in 2017, credits places such as Terminal Gravity Brewing in Enterprise and Great Pacific in



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Bottling has opened new retail sales options for Rain Barrel Ciderworks in Baker City.

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WALLOWA COUNTY

Thriving despite pandemic, wildfire

Wallowa Mountain Bar & Grill opens in Wallowa

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — The coronavirus pandemic and the Elbow Creek Fire, while both devastating, have had their silver linings for the Wallowa area. It's there where Jason and Patty Skillings opened the Wallowa Mountain Bar & Grill.

"Everything around here's been closed with the COVID thing," Jason said of the former Horseshoe Bar & Grill on Main Street. "They shut this one down, so we thought, 'What a better time to start one up.'"

The influx of hundreds of firefighters into town has proven a boon to the establishment, but one they see as an opportunity to be of help.

"You just do what you've got to do. We just try to keep everybody happy and make sure they have a place (to eat)," Patty said. "We've told them that if they come in later, just let us know and we'll make sure we get them something. If we have to turn the grills back on, we'll do that for them. There's so many shifts, when they come back into town and need someplace to eat, we'll get that for them."

The establishment opened June 7, Patty said.

"We have been very busy," she said Tuesday, July 20. "We haven't been open for a week because of some pipes, and our customers are saying, 'When are you open? We want to be back. We're missing you.' But we plan to open tomorrow morning at 6 a.m.," she said.

Plenty to eat

The menu is not unique, but looks tasty.

A fairly standard breakfast menu features items that have tickled the palates of many.

"The Wallowa Mountain Breakfast is pretty popular," Patty said, referring to the three-egg order that comes

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Crop prices spur spending on farm machinery

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

SALEM — Higher crop prices have lifted farmers' spirits in 2021, spurring a powerful appetite for new farm machinery after years of lackluster demand, experts say.

Unit sales of new tractors over 100 horsepower rose 23% during the first half of the year, while unit sales of four-wheel-drive tractors surged 32%, according to the Association of Equipment Manufacturers. Unit sales of self-propelled combines increased 11% in that time.

"Commodity prices are a pretty good indication of how farmers feel, and if they feel good, they're going to invest in capital equipment," said Curt Blades, AEM's senior vice president of ag services.

Large machinery sales plummeted during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic but recovered enough to end 2020



AGCO/Contributed Photo, File

Farm machinery sales have risen sharply in 2021 as growers reap the benefits of higher commodity crop prices.

on a positive note.

An upswing in commodity prices, partly buoyed by foreign demand for U.S. crops, has convinced farmers to spend

more readily on major purchases in 2021, Blades said.

Exciting new automation technology has also helped, as has the solid market for used machinery

that's ensured high trade-in values, he said.

"You don't invest a half-million dollars in a combine unless you feel pretty good about your

future in the next few years," Blades said.

Growers are now probably seeing their strongest net returns since 2013, which also marked a high

point of investment in machinery before years of weaker demand, said Michael Langemeier, a Purdue University agricultural economist who tracks the industry.

"Looking at the U.S. as a whole, 2021 is going to be better than anything from 2014 to 2019," he said.

With a better income outlook, farmers are now more willing to replace their machinery — both because some of it is wearing out, and also to reduce their tax obligations, Langemeier said.

The enthusiasm for investing in machinery doesn't appear much diminished by the higher cost of steel and other inputs, which have made equipment more expensive, he said.

"Even though the costs are higher, the returns are strong enough to offset that," he said.

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