

Hospitality workers see wages increase

Oregon's average hospitality wage jumps 10.5% in past 12 months

By **MIKE ROGOWAY**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Jobs in restaurants and taverns frequently sit at the bottom end of the pay scale, with waiters, line cooks and bartenders sometimes treated as easily replaceable — and paid accordingly.

COVID-19 has turned that calculus on its head.

Pandemic shutdowns put thousands of Oregon hospitality workers out of work. And as the economy reopened, hotels, restaurants, taverns and gyms are finding they have to pay a premium to get those workers back.

Oregon's average hospitality wage has jumped by an astonishing 10.5% in just the past 12 months, to \$19.49 an hour in July. For a full-time worker, that works out to a \$3,800 raise on an annual basis.

Many hospitality businesses are offering bonuses to bring in workers. The McMenamins hotel and brewpub chain is offering \$1,000, for example, to new hires who take jobs as line cooks or kitchen managers.

The dramatic pay hikes reflect the weird economics of the pandemic.

It took nearly nine years after the Great Recession for Oregon hospitality wages to return to their pre-downturn levels. At that time, the economy was very slow to regain its footing.

In the wake of the pandemic recession, though, most sectors snapped right back. And businesses in those fields that recovered quickly began snapping up workers, some of whom had been laid off from their old jobs in the hospitality industry.

That left restaurants, hotels and bars struggling to find staff to fill their establishments — and paying a premium to get those workers they could find.

The numbers show that these businesses have been only partially successful. Leisure and hospitality employment remains down 18% from the summer of 2019, even as the rest of Oregon's economy has largely recovered.

Why does Oregon have fewer people working in leisure and hospitality now? Well, bartenders and waiters didn't pack up and move out of state. Instead, many of them took other work while their old jobs were shut down by the pandemic.

"A lot of them just said, 'I need to work somewhere,' and looked around, and found something else," said David Cooke, economist with the Oregon Employment Department.

Amazon and other online retailers and delivery services continued hiring through the pandemic and raised wages as it became harder to find workers.

Oregon wages are up overall, so hospitality businesses had to raise their own pay to catch up.

"It's based on supply and demand," Cooke said, "where the supply of people who are available and able and ready to work is relatively low compared to the demand."

WALLOWA COUNTY



Grim harvest

Brothers Kurt, left, and Kevin Melville operate combines harvesting dryland wheat north of Enterprise on Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021. The Melvilles said the dryland crop was particularly devastated by this year's drought.

Farmers get low crop yields after summer drought

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — A hot, dry summer seems to have come to an end with a few days of rain that grain farmers didn't necessarily need as they got going on harvest.

"With most harvests you have a little rain," Kevin Melville of Cornerstone Farms said.

Cornerstone, which Melville operates with his father, Tim, his brother, Kurt, and their wives, is one of the largest small-grains producers in Wallowa County, growing wheat but also sizable crops of hay, peas, canola and mustard.

Possibly the worst of what was harvested was the Melvilles' dryland wheat. The Melville brothers were hard at it harvesting dark northern spring (DNS) wheat north of Enterprise on Wednesday, Aug. 18, but they were disappointed in what the unirrigated fields were yielding.

Kevin said they were getting about six bushels per acre there when they normally get 60-70 bushels.

"It's a good thing we have insurance," he said.

Cornerstone's fall-planted irrigated wheat isn't doing nearly as bad, Melville said.

"With the irrigated, everything we've cut so far is slightly below normal," he said, adding the yield has been about 120 bushels per acre, when it should be around 130.

"Fall wheat is within the margin of error," he said. "Everything's about 10 bushels lower than average on the irrigated side."

Not worth it

Many of the crops are hardly worth the trouble.

Melville said they didn't even bother with their peas and timothy grass hay.

Rather than wasting the fuel to attempt to harvest a crop not worth the effort, "We just walked away from those," he said. "We never harvested the timothy hay."

Unfortunately, they didn't have



Kurt Melville, of Cornerstone Farms, unloads wheat after harvesting a dryland field north of Enterprise on Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2021. The dryland crops were particularly hurt by this year's drought.

crop insurance on the peas or timothy grass.

Jim Dunham, who raises feed barley off Dunham Road north of Enterprise, agreed the drought was a killer. He was in a holding pattern in mid-August, waiting for the rain to dry out. His prospects for harvest were not looking good.

"There just isn't any because of the drought. I'll run the combine through, but that's about it," Dunham said. "It's a very poor crop."

In fact, he said, in the 60-plus years he's been farming there, it's about as bad as it's ever been.

"This is as poor a crop as I've ever seen," he said, agreeing that it must get better in the future. "I hope it don't get worse."

Dunham said he usually rotates his barley crop with hay to feed the 350-400 cattle that provide the mainstay of his income.

He said he too is hoping federal crop insurance will bail him out this year.

"I hope to get enough back to what I've got into the crop," he said.

He compared his dryland barley to what the Melvilles are getting in their dryland DNS.

"It's about the same comparison to the barley I raise," Dunham said.

For barley, that usually means

about 2 tons an acre. This year, he's hoping to get half a ton per acre.

"It's hardly enough to even combine," he said. "If we get more than that, I'll be tickled to death."

Drought's the killer

The drought and the accompanying hot wind that further dried up the crops never allowed them to grow, Dunham said.

Dan Butterfield, who farms with his sons, Robert and Eric, and their wives, raises about 600 acres of DNS near Joseph. He agreed the heat was a killer this year.

"This heat was relentless," Butterfield said. "It was pretty hard on it. (Wheat) just doesn't grow as well under that intense heat. Alfalfa does well in heat, but wheat and grass don't do well."

He said that although DNS is fairly drought resistant and a "protein wheat," it still didn't yield as large a harvest as he had hoped. He said he cut one dryland field on the moraine he estimated as a yield of 35 bushels per acre. He said Portland prices are more than \$10 a bushel, but it costs about \$1 a bushel to get it there by truck.

Being a protein wheat, DNS tends to make more protein in

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Bank closing its downtown branch

Adams Avenue location of Umpqua Bank to close in late October

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande is set to lose one of its two Umpqua Bank branches. The branch 1215 Adams Ave. will close permanently at 2 p.m. Oct. 28.

The Island City branch of Umpqua Bank, 3106 Island Ave., will stay open.

A statement from Umpqua Bank's headquarters in Portland implied, but does not specifically state, that the Adams Avenue branch is being closed because there is less of a need for brick and mortar banks in today's internet age.

"Umpqua continues to adapt to the reality that people visit store locations less and less and now do most of their day-to-day banking by computer or phone. As a result, we've been consolidating our number of stores the past few years based on a variety of factors, such as overall foot traffic and proximity to other locations," the statement read.

Customer accounts and loans at the Adams Avenue branch will be transferred to the Island City branch. No "customer action" will be needed for this to occur, according to the statement.

The company said it will reach out to customers who are affected by the closure.

"During the transition, we are committed to working with each and every customer to make sure they have the support they need," the company's statement read.

A statement on Umpqua Bank's web page for its Adams Avenue branch said of the upcoming closure, "While this means the end of our in-person relationship at this location, we are eager to continue to serve you at nearby stores and support your banking needs through our online and mobile banking services."

The web page also stated that people who have a safe deposit box at the Adams Avenue branch are asked to come in and close their box

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Brokerage accounts may net better investment earnings



LIZ WESTON
ASK LIZ

Dear Liz: I'm retired, age 67. I have a SEP that requires me to pay taxes on any withdrawals. I also have standard savings and checking accounts. The SEP has been earning 13% to 14% annually, and of course the savings account earns very little. Where does it make sense for me to place savings each month — in the bank or the SEP?

Answer: Well, not the SEP. A SEP is a simplified employee pension plan that only allowed contributions as long as you were employed by the company that offered it.

Besides, the reason for the difference in returns is what's in the account, not the account itself. The SEP probably is invested in stocks, while the savings account is just cash earning the current low

interest rates. On the other hand, the money in your savings account is FDIC insured so that you won't lose your principal.

Money in the stock market is at risk because stocks don't always rise in value. (Over time, a diversified mix of stocks typically will earn better returns than other types of investments, but you can't count on the money being there if you need it in a hurry.)

If you're retired and don't have earned income, you can't put money into other retirement accounts such as IRAs or Roth IRAs. You can, however, open a brokerage account and invest money through that. You'll still pay taxes on any withdrawals, but if you hold the investments for at least a year you can benefit from lower capital gains tax rates.

Dear Liz: I'm attempting to become as paperless as possible while also organizing all of our financial information into one place so if one of us dies, the other (or our child) will be able to access

everything in one concise source. My current system is downloading all bank and investment accounts and medical payments onto memory sticks. One is kept in the safe deposit box, the other hidden. Is there a better, safer system out there that would not involve a third party?

Answer: If you're unwilling to use a secure online storage site, then your system is a reasonable if somewhat laborious option. You should be sure, however, that your trusted person will have access to your computer for the most up-to-date information. The person also probably will need access to your phone, since identity authentication codes are often sent by text.

You'll need to record passwords for your devices and consider creating a list of logins and passwords for all the sites you regularly use. If you use a password manager, you often can set up emergency access for trusted people.

Going paperless is usually the most convenient, safe and eco-

logically friendly option, but your trusted person won't be able to rummage through your desk to find clues about where your assets are, what bills need to be paid and what services should be shut down. Otherwise, as one friend put it, your frequent flier miles could disappear while your Netflix subscription continues indefinitely.

If you want a system that doesn't involve frequent trips to your safe deposit box, consider sites such as Everplans that allow you to store important information and to name people who can be given access if you're incapacitated or dead. Your accountant or attorney may be able to recommend other sites that perform similar functions.

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