

Choosing Oregon

When remote workers can live anywhere, some choose Oregon while others leave

By **JAMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — In the years before the pandemic, Duncan Gans would fantasize with his then-scattered college friends about moving together to the same city.

The idea seemed fanciful. His friends worked in offices across the United States. And while Gans sometimes worked remotely and traveled for his job at a public opinion research firm, he still felt pressured to live in Washington, D.C., where his company is based.

But when office workers were sent home en masse in the early days of the pandemic, Gans began to wonder whether he needed to remain in the small row house he shared with eight others to save money in an expensive rental market. In August 2020, he and four of his friends from Bowdoin College, a small liberal arts school in Maine, packed up and moved across the country to live together in a house in Bend.

“I work in a space where there was an assumption that you live in this 30-mile radius around D.C.,” said Gans, 24. “That was honestly a big deterrent for me doing that work, despite it being something I really care about. Being able to live in a place that has a lot of outdoor access but still do work that I really enjoy means a lot.”

Millions of workers across the United States switched to remote work early in the pandemic. Nearly two years later, many still haven’t returned to offices, and it’s become clear some never will.

The newfound freedom to work from anywhere has allowed some to rethink where they want to live, a trend that could have profound impacts on the economy and lead to a long-term shift in national migration patterns.

Before the pandemic, only about 6% of the American workforce worked from home, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. A separate Bureau of Labor Statistics survey found that the number of people working remotely jumped to 35% in May 2020 before steadily declining over the next year. An elevated 11% of the U.S. workforce was continuing to work from home as of November, according to the survey.

Hiring benefit

Some large companies have embraced the shift as a permanent one, saying their employees will forever have the option to work remotely and are using those policies to lure new hires. Some cities and states are looking to take advantage of the shift, too. Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, will pay remote workers up to \$10,000 to move to the city.

Josh Lehner, an analyst with Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis, said it’s too early to know how prevalent remote work will be in the long term and how a spike in telecommuting could change migration patterns. He said it’s important to note that only about a third of jobs in the United States can be done remotely.

However, the longer the pandemic drags on, he said, the more likely the new work patterns will stick. Oregon had more people working from home and better internet access than most states before the pandemic, Lehner noted, which could make it a desirable destination for remote workers in the future.

And while the long-term effects are still unclear, even a small change in the percentage of people working remotely could have far-reaching effects.

“This is the equivalent of the internet in 1997,” Lehner said. “We’re years away from knowing how this is going to work out.”

Some come here, some leave

It is clear, however, that a move to remote work during the pandemic has given many workers more options. Some, like Gans, are choosing to come to Oregon. Others are choosing to leave.

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Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Robert Minarich, co-owner of Sim Shot, a new virtual gun range in Island City, plays through a round of a boar-hunting simulation on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022.

ENTERTAINMENT AND FIREARM SAFETY

Virtual gun range opens in Island City

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

ISLAND CITY — A first-of-its-kind shooting range recently marked its grand opening in town.

Sim Shot, a virtual shooting range that focuses on entertainment and firearm safety, opened its doors for business on Friday, Jan. 21. Owner Robert Minarich and the team at Sim Shot hope to create a unique new entertainment venue in Northeastern Oregon, as well as a hub for promoting responsible firearm usage.

“We want it to be that fun atmosphere. We’re trying to bring something fun and exciting to town to give people something to do,” he said. “Beyond entertainment, we also really want to promote safe, responsible gun ownership.”

Top simulation technology

Sim Shot is more than just an arcade, with the industry’s top simulation technology creating realistic shooting scenarios in more than 40 simulated options. With an entertainment concept



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

David Chaney, right, and Robert Minarich go through training simulations at Sim Shot in Island City on Friday, Jan. 21, 2022.

modeled similar to Top Golf and bowling alleys, the business serves a primary purpose of entertainment for all ages. In addition, an array of training exercises promote gun safety and learning opportunities at the virtual range.

The new business is located at 10200 W. First St., Island City, near where Island Avenue meets Highway 82, and is owned by Minarich and his parents, John and Beverly. The location, which the owners and employees spent all summer renovating, offers four bays

for simulated shooting. Each bay has a projector with 42 total simulation options, with hunting and entertainment games available as well as drills that simulate official shooting qualifications.

The technology includes a shot camera connected to each projector, which is calibrated through a computer. An invisible laser is shot out of each gun, allowing for accurate shooting simulations — much more precise than a run-of-the-mill arcade shooting game.

“We can be extremely

accurate, down to the pixel,” Minarich said. “Shot placement is very accurate and people will find that they have to aim down the sight posts to get an accurate shot.”

Genesis of the idea

Minarich and his father, who are also co-owners of Wind-hill Holsters and Alpine Alarm, came up with the idea while attending SHOT Show in Las Vegas in early 2020.

“We were just roaming around looking at stuff and were talking about how cool it would be to have an indoor gun range here in town,” Minarich said. “We had a blast doing it. We walked away and started scratching our heads, thinking that we can do something with it.”

Minarich partnered with David Chaney, an employee at Sim Shot who had a similar vision for the opportunities of a virtual shooting range in La Grande. The business model caters toward entertainment options, including bookings for parties, business gatherings, group sessions and more. As for the firearm safety aspect, Minarich emphasized

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JOBS IN OREGON

Oregon jobless rate edged down to 4.1% in December

That was before the worst of the omicron surge

By **KATE DAVIDSON**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon’s unemployment rate inched down again in December, though it was measured too early in the month to account for the widespread disruption of the omicron surge.

The state added 8,200 jobs last month. Unemployment decreased to 4.1% from 4.2% in November, marking the 20th month in a row the state’s jobless rate has improved.

The national unemployment rate was 3.9% in December.

In Oregon, December job gains were biggest in the leisure and hospitality sector, as well as in health care and social assistance, manufacturing, and professional and business services.

But despite businesses such as gyms, hotels and restaurants gaining more than 2,600 jobs last month, they still have a long way to go. The leisure and hospitality sector ended the year 23,000 jobs below its pre-pandemic peak.

The state closed out 2021 with near-record high job vacancies. Private employers listed 103,000 job openings between October and December, ratcheting up the already-intense pressure to compete for workers. The sheer number of open positions dwarfed the state’s pre-pandemic high of 66,000 vacancies in the summer of 2017.

“We’re not just a little bit above where we were before. This is head and shoulders above where we’ve been before,” said economist Gail Krumenauer with the Oregon Employment Department.

Average starting wages rose to \$21 per hour in the fall, Krumenauer said. That’s a head-turning 14% increase, year-over-year, after adjusting for inflation.

But even rising wages can’t make up for this fact:

There are now more job openings in Oregon than there are unemployed people.

The pandemic is still making it hard for many people to be available for work. And the omicron surge is exacerbating that.

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Oregon has more open jobs than it does unemployed people

By **MIKE ROGOWAY**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon employers had a notoriously difficult time filling jobs all last year.

Burger flippers, chip-makers, pipefitters, nurses. They were all in short supply.

New data out from the state helps explain why. Employers posted tens of thousands of job openings last year as the pandemic recession faded.

At the same time, Oregon’s unemployment rate plunged.

That created an unprecedented mismatch: By fall, the state had more job openings than people looking for work. It’s the first time that’s happened since at least 2013, when Oregon began conducting its quarterly job vacancy survey.

The most recent survey from the Oregon Employment Department found the state had about 103,000 job openings in October. That’s actually slightly fewer than during the summer.

The state’s labor squeeze didn’t ease up at all, though, because unemployment was falling even faster. Oregon’s jobless rate dropped to just 4.4% in October, near a historic low. It fell to 4.2% in November.

Layoffs spiked when the pandemic hit Oregon in the spring of 2020. At that time, when Oregon unemployment was at a record high, there were nearly six people on the jobless rolls for every open job.

By the fall of 2021, though, the situation had reversed.

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