

## Jobs on the rebound from the pandemic

By **MIKE ROGOWAY**  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon hit a pandemic milestone this summer, with employment surpassing pre-pandemic levels. It took the state just 30 months to recover all 282,000 jobs lost to COVID-19, a much faster recovery than in most prior recessions.

The comeback has been uneven, though, with some jobs rapidly surpassing 2019 employment levels while other industries continue to lag. A new state report on Oregon's jobs recovery finds some patterns in which sectors are thriving and which remain underwater.

Those coming back the strongest all have connections to people in their homes: They're "working from them, building them, making deliveries to them, or selling or leasing them," according to the report from Gail Krumenauer, economist with the Oregon Employment Department.

Jobs at the tail end of the recovery are those most disrupted by the pandemic, including hospitality, education and health care.

The slowest comebacks are in entertainment and hospitality jobs. Theaters, bars and restaurants shut down in the spring of 2020, closed by government mandate to prevent spread of the coronavirus.

**30**

The number of months it took Oregon to recover the jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**282,000**

The number of jobs that were lost during the pandemic.

The entertainment and hospitality sectors lost more than half their jobs in March and April 2020 and neither sector has fully recovered. Hospitality is down more than 5%, nearly 11,000 jobs, according to the latest state data.

Education and health care jobs have also been slow to come back. Krumenauer's report notes that, while other industries steadily recovered jobs after the initial burst of pandemic layoffs, hospital and nursing facilities kept losing jobs through the spring of 2022. They're still struggling to staff up now.

In the health care field, and many other industries, the lost jobs are less a reflection of continued economic weakness than the ongoing worker shortage. Vacant jobs far outnumber unemployed Oregonians, and the shortage is especially acute in the hospitality and health care fields.

Health care organizations have been unable to retain workers burned out by the extraordinary conditions brought on by the pandemic. State wage data shows that many people working in bars and restaurants before the pandemic have moved on to other industries with higher wages and better hours.

It's clear there's plenty of opportunity to choose from.

Professional and technical services, a broad category that includes architects, engineers and some computer programmers, enjoyed the fastest comeback from the pandemic. Krumenauer notes those are jobs people can do remotely and the sector experienced only a modest dip in the early days of COVID-19. Employment is now up nearly 10% from early 2020.

Construction work is also growing rapidly, fueled by home remodeling projects during the stay-at-home era and strong housing demand.

Oregon warehousing jobs had one of the smallest dips as the pandemic began, as people turned to online shopping to spend their stimulus checks while avoiding COVID-19 exposure in stores. The warehousing and transportation sector had recovered all the jobs it lost at the pandemic's outset within two months, then kept growing.

That growth appears to have plateaued, though, amid slower growth in internet orders. Amazon has closed some warehouses elsewhere in the country and shelved plans to open others, including a major "sort center" that had been planned for Canby. Construction never started there.

The pandemic recession was the deepest in state history, with unemployment peaking at 13.3%.



Brooke Herbert/The Oregonian

Oregon construction employment is up 7% from February 2020, among the fastest growing industries in the pandemic's wake.



La Grande's new bowling alley, Brickyard Lanes, on Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021, was ready for its grand opening.

The Observer, File

## EXCELLENCE on main street

Two La Grande downtown businesses and one volunteer are lauded by Oregon Main Street

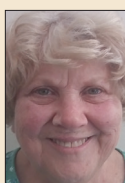
By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**  
The Observer

**L**A GRANDE — Two local businesses and a founding member of La Grande Main Street

Downtown received recognition from Oregon Main Street during the annual main street conference on Wednesday, Oct. 5, in Klamath Falls.

The Excellence on Main awards, which honor accomplishments, activities and people making a difference in historic downtowns, were given to La Grande City Councilor Mary Ann Miesner, Gust and Karin Tsiatsos for The Local and Darrin Kiesecker for Brickyard Lanes.

"Part of my job is to serve on the board for the Main Street program and I just feel like the ability to pick up some recognition for several great projects and an amazing volunteer is great news," La Grande's economic development



Miesner



The Observer, File

Customers at The Local, on Adams Avenue in La Grande, can enjoy their coffee, ice cream or other treats inside the cafe, outside on the patio, or in this open-front covered area with a fireplace, photographed on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022.

director, Timothy Bishop, said.

Miesner received the Leadership on Main award, recognizing an individual who has shown dedication to their local main street over a long period of time. Miesner, a lifelong resident of La Grande, is a founding member of La Grande Main Street Downtown. She has served on the board and chaired many committees and currently acts as the promotion committee chair.

"I was very honored to receive that award. I've dedicated a lot of time and energy into our downtown," Miesner said. "I got a lot of inspiration and ideas to bring back to La Grande (from the conference)."

The Tsiatsos duo received the Best Adaptive Reuse award for The Local, 1508 Adams Ave. The award recognizes the best reimagining of a historic building into a new contemporary use, while preserving the history and char-

acter of the building. The pair purchased the dilapidated Texaco station in 2020 and gave it new life as a coffee and ice cream cafe.

"We are very honored and proud of La Grande to be recognized," Gust Tsiatsos said.

The final award for La Grande went to Kiesecker with Brickyard Lanes, 1212 Jefferson Ave. Kiesecker won the Outstanding Special Project, which recognizes perseverance in bringing a project to fruition and helping to build community. The building was originally constructed in 1908 and has housed a hotel, mercantile, farm equipment store and Eagles lodge. Kiesecker and his family purchased the building in 2013 but were not able to open until 2021 due to construction delays. The bowling alley blends the original style of the building with modern-day convenience to create a year-round indoor recreation space.

## Insurance agent marks one year

Austin Young celebrates first year as head of Allstate Insurance office in downtown La Grande

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

**L**A GRANDE — It was a moment both one and eight years in the making.

Austin Young, the head of the Allstate insurance office in La Grande, on Thursday, Oct. 6, marked the one-year anniversary of his taking the reins of the office.

The event, put on in conjunction with the Union County Chamber of Com-

merce, featured a ribbon cutting and an open house marking Young's anniversary of becoming the Allstate exclusive insurance agent in La Grande.

Young may have just completed his first year in his new position, but he has deep roots with Allstate's La Grande office and Union County. Young worked for Allstate's La Grande office for eight years before taking its reins a year ago after purchasing it from Brent Wylam, who has moved outside the area. Young said he learned a lot from Wylam, who was head of La Grande's Allstate office from 2012 through 2021.

"He taught me the importance of taking care of people



Dick Mason/The Observer

Austin Young, center, the head of Allstate Insurance's La Grande office, prepares to cut a ribbon at a ceremony marking the first anniversary of his taking the reins of the office on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2022. Also shown, from left, are Scott Newman, director of the Union County Chamber of Commerce; Young's wife, Renee Wells, who also works at the insurance office; and Anthony Swales and JoHanna Pettet, chamber ambassadors for the Union County Chamber of Commerce.

See, Agent/Page B6