

DOW 31,493.34 -119.68	NASDAQ 13,865.36 -100.14	S&P 500 3,913.97 -17.36	30-YR T-BOND 2.07% ...	CRUDE OIL \$60.52 -.62	GOLD \$1,773.40 +2.30	SILVER \$27.08 -.23	EURO \$1.2085 +.0048
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BRIEFING

Daimler Trucks names new CEO

Daimler Trucks North America named a new CEO Tuesday, John O'Leary. A 20-year veteran of the company, he begins his new role April 1.

Daimler Trucks employees about 2,600 at its North American headquarters on Swan Island. Its Portland operations include corporation functions, research and engineering and production of the Western Star truck line. It also has a test track near Madras Airport.

Daimler, a German company, is in the process of spinning off its truck and bus division from its Mercedes-Benz line of luxury cars.

O'Leary, 60, was CEO of Thomas Built Buses before joining Daimler, where he served as chief financial officer and chief transformation officer. He succeeds Roger Nielsen, 60, who is retiring after 35 years with the company.

Nielsen worked in North Carolina, but Daimler said O'Leary's office will be at the company's Swan Island office.

Gucci opens new store in Portland

Gucci has opened a new 6,500-square-foot store at Pioneer Place in downtown Portland.

The boutique is the luxury fashion brand's first store in Oregon and features a wide range of men's and women's shoes, handbags, luggage, jewelry and other products. The store officially opened Feb. 12.

The new boutique is a boon for downtown Portland, which is struggling to recover from myriad challenges.

Foot traffic downtown plummeted last year as companies asked employees to work from home and tourism dried up amid the pandemic, leaving downtown businesses with a limited customer base. During the height of the holiday season in December, foot traffic in downtown was down more than 80% from the year prior.

Some downtown businesses, including the Apple store across the street from Pioneer Place, have not reopened since last summer when protests consumed the downtown core.

US jobless claims rise to 861,000

The number of Americans applying for unemployment aid rose last week to 861,000, evidence that layoffs remain painfully high despite a steady drop in the number of confirmed viral infections.

Applications from laid-off workers rose 13,000 from the previous week, which was revised sharply higher, the Labor Department said Thursday. Before the virus erupted in the United States in March, weekly applications for unemployment benefits had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

The figures underscore that the job market has stalled, with employers having added a mere 49,000 jobs in January after cutting workers in December. Nearly 10 million jobs remain lost to the pandemic. Though the unemployment rate fell last month from 6.7%, to 6.3%, it did so in part because some people stopped looking for jobs.

— Bulletin wire reports

OREGON EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT

Agency fights fraudulent claims

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Employment Department is devoting more attention to preventing and fighting fraud, by hiring more people and training others, as the agency pays out a record amount of unemployment benefits, the acting director said.

David Gerstenfeld said peo-

ple are being added to the unit that works with police and prosecutors to detect and combat fraud, and current staff members are undergoing additional training to recognize potentially fraudulent claims.

"Unfortunately, this has been a bigger frontier than usual during this pandemic and we have been spending a lot of time focusing on that," he told

reporters on a weekly conference call Wednesday. "We expect it will be an ongoing focus."

Gerstenfeld has disclosed no figures. He has said he does not want to give any hints that might encourage numerous organized efforts at fraud. But he has said previously that Oregon has nowhere near the degree of losses reported in

California, \$11.4 billion as of January, and Washington, \$600 million, according to a state audit in December.

The agency already has an internet address to report fraud. It's unemployment.oregon.gov/unemployment-insurance-fraud-id-theft.

There's also a hotline at 877-668-3204.

Gerstenfeld was the director

of the unemployment benefits division from 2011 to 2019, when he took a different job within the agency. Gov. Kate Brown named him the acting director of the department on May 31, 2020, after she fired his predecessor over big backlogs resulting from a record number of unemployment claims.

See **Claims** / A8

Seed industry continues to **SPROUT**



Courtesy of Territorial Seed Co. via Capital Press

In Cottage Grove, Territorial Seed's farm operation supplies about 17% of its seed; the company buys the remainder from seed producers worldwide, including contracting with local growers.

BY SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN • Capital Press

Almost a year into COVID-19, the domestic seed industry is flourishing. "A lot of seed companies are selling out. Some warehouses are empty of seed. They're having an incredible year," said Angie Smith, executive director of the Oregon Seed Association.

Industry leaders say when the pandemic hit in March, there was an alarming lull in sales. But from about April on, experts say, sales took off in most seed sectors, and the momentum has continued into 2021.

The specialty seed sector, including vegetable and flower seeds, is blooming on the retail level. Last year, Americans nationwide planted a record number of gardens. Extension agents at the time wondered whether people's interest in gardening would carry into 2021. So far, the answer appears to be "yes."

"The season started off awfully strong again," said Tom Johns, president of Territorial Seed Co.

in Cottage Grove. "When our catalog came out around January, we had a very high volume of orders that was equal to or surpassed the peak of the pandemic last year."

Territorial has had so many orders, Johns said, that he and his wife, who usually take off Sundays, have worked extra.

Territorial's farm operation supplies about 17% of its seed; the company buys the remainder from seed producers worldwide, including contracting with local growers.

Along with vegetables, Johns said people are also buying flower seeds to "decorate" their yards.

See **Seeds** / A8

Oregon landlords can apply for relief

BY JAMIE GOLDBERG

The Oregonian

Landlords in Oregon whose tenants have fallen behind on rent during the coronavirus pandemic can now apply for relief from the state.

Applications for Oregon's new landlord compensation fund opened Wednesday, nearly two months after state lawmakers allocated \$150 million to seed the program.

Landlords can apply for relief to cover 80% of the rent they are owed by tenants dating back to April 2020. However, they will be required to forgive 20% of unpaid rent.

Nicole Stingham, a spokesman for Oregon Housing and Community Services, which is administering the fund, said her agency will make \$50 million available during the first round of funding. The agency expects to offer at least three rounds of funding before the end of June.

With limited money available, the state has opted to prioritize landlords owed the greatest percentage of rent and those with fewer properties.

Tenants must sign a declaration of financial hardship for landlords to submit with their applications, a requirement that some landlords raised concerns about during conversations with Oregon Housing and Community Services in January. Those landlords worried about losing out on the opportunity to receive relief if their tenants didn't sign the declaration.

Oregon lawmakers created the new compensation fund in December as part of legislation that extended the state's eviction moratorium through June for renters who declare they are experiencing financial hardship.

Along with allocating \$150 million to the new fund, lawmakers provided an additional \$50 million to existing rent relief programs. Tenants can find out how to apply for that relief through local community action agencies or by calling 211. That assistance will also be paid directly to landlords to cover past due rent.

Oregon Housing and Community Services is also receiving roughly \$200 million more in rental assistance from the federal government, Stingham said last month. She said the agency was waiting on additional guidance before allocating those funds.

Earlier this month, Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, and Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, introduced a bill that would offer tax credits over a five-year period to landlords who forgive past-due rent. Landlords would be allowed to sell credits to other Oregon taxpayers.

Landlords approved for funding through the new compensation fund are unlikely to see any money until at least mid-March.

Despite damage caused by snowstorm, Enchanted Forest aims to open March 19

BY JAKE THOMAS

Salem Reporter

SALEM — When snow and ice storms were included in last weekend's forecast, Susan Vaslev worried about Enchanted Forest.

Vaslev also recalled thinking how little could be done to protect the well-loved amusement park south of Salem that her family has owned and operated for nearly 50 years.

"If the trees are going to fall, there is no way to keep them from falling," she recalled thinking.

She knew the park had been damaged by the storm on Saturday when the fire alarm went

off in the Challenge of Mondor ride because the water pipes had depressurized. She drove out to the park, on the slope of a hill, but didn't go inside out of safety concerns.

From the parking lot, she could see the big Douglas firs and other trees that had collapsed under the weight of the snow and ice.

On Sunday, she was finally able to walk through the park to survey the damage.

The kiddie train was completely crushed under a fallen tree. The covered seating area by the theater was also crushed.

See **Enchanted** / A8



Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian file

Fallen trees damaged areas of the Enchanted Forest, a woodland amusement park outside of Salem.