

▼ DOW 32,862.30 -153.07	▼ NASDAQ 13,116.17 -409.03	▼ S&P 500 3,915.46 -58.66	▲ 30-YR T-BOND 2.48% +0.04	▼ CRUDE OIL \$60.00 -4.60	▲ GOLD \$1,732.20 +5.40	▲ SILVER \$26.32 +.29	▼ EURO \$1.1914 -.0065
--	---	--	---	--	--	--	---

BRIEFING

VW issued a false news release

Volkswagen of America issued false statements this week saying it would change its brand name to "Voltswagen," as a way to stress its commitment to electric vehicles, only to reverse course Tuesday and admit that the supposed name change was just a joke.

Mark Gillies, a company spokesman, confirmed Tuesday that the statement had been a pre-April Fool's Day joke, after having insisted Monday that the release was legitimate and the name change accurate.

The company's false release was distributed again Tuesday, saying the brand name change reflected VW's switch to more battery-electric vehicles.

The company is trying to change its image and recover from a 2015 scandal in which it cheated on government emissions tests and allowed diesel-powered vehicles to illegally pollute the air.

U.S. consumer confidence surges

U.S. consumer confidence surged in March to the highest reading in a year, helped by increased vaccinations and more government economic support.

The Conference Board said Tuesday its consumer confidence index rose to 109.7 in March, the best showing since it stood at 118.8 in March of last year as the pandemic was beginning to hit the United States. The index stood at 90.4 in February.

The present situations index, based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions, rose to 110.0, up from 89.6 in February. The expectations' index, based on consumers outlook six months into the future, also improved, rising to 109.6 in March, up from a reading of 90.9 in February.

Most economists are forecasting strong growth in coming quarters, powered by a surge in consumer confidence and consumer spending, which accounts for 70% of economic activity.

U.S. home prices soared in January

U.S. home prices increased at the fastest pace in seven years in January as the pandemic has fueled demand for single-family houses even as the supply for such homes shrinks.

The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller 20-city home price index, released Tuesday, rose 11.1% in January from a year earlier. That's the biggest gain since March 2014. Prices rose in all 20 cities, and the 12-month increase was larger for all cities in January than in the previous month.

"January's data remain consistent with the view that COVID has encouraged potential buyers to move from urban apartments to suburban homes," said Craig Lazara, managing director and global head of Index Investment Strategy at S&P DJI.

The biggest price gain was in Phoenix, where home prices jumped 15.8%, followed by Seattle, with a 14.3% gain, and San Diego, at 14.2%.

— Bulletin wire reports

Deschutes County fills 7 out of 10 jobs lost

BY SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin

When Deschutes County moved out of the extreme risk category for spreading COVID-19, businesses began hiring, filling 7 out of every 10 jobs lost since the initial shut-downs, according to the Oregon Employment Department monthly data.

The unemployment rate in February fell again in Deschutes County to 6.8%, still

higher than a year ago at the same time when it was 3.4%, according to the data released Tuesday morning.

Most of the job growth in Deschutes County was in the leisure and hospitality sectors, which added 780 jobs. In February, the county moved into the high risk category, which allowed 25% capacity for in-person dining. On March 12, the county moved into the moderate risk category, which

allows for 50% capacity inside a restaurant.

Damon Runberg, Oregon Employment Department regional economist, predicted that the job gains are the sign the county is heading toward a full recovery and predicted that pent-up travel demand this summer will translate into a robust summer for Central Oregon's leisure and hospitality industries.

"For the past four months

we had seen flat job growth or job losses. These numbers show a return of recovery, which is necessary," Runberg said. "The vaccine rollout is going well; we expect to see everyone who is eligible for a vaccine by May and there's a high savings rate."

"It feels like people will start spending money again, and we as a local economy will be a direct beneficiary of that with travel and tourism."

Crook County, however, held on to an 8% unemployment rate in February, which is nearly double the 4.8% it was at the same time last year, according to the data.

Jefferson County's unemployment rate dropped to 6.9% in February, down from 7.1% in January, but far higher than it was in the same time the year before when it was 4.3%.

Reporter: 541-633-2117, sroig@bendbulletin.com

COVID-19 pilot project

Morrow County vaccinates hundreds of ag workers

BY BRYCE DOLE
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — Maria Corona knew she wanted to get the vaccine. Three months earlier, eight of her family members tested positive for COVID-19. So had many of her co-workers and neighbors.

"I was really concerned," said Corona, who, at 49, spends half the year working in food processing plants and the other half working in the fields near her home in Boardman. "You hear a lot in the news that people are dying, so you get afraid."

The day after Corona learned through Facebook that she and her co-workers were eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, she hopped in her Dodge Caravan and made her way down to the visitor center just off Interstate 84. State and county health of-



Jorge Tapia Madrigal looks away as he receives his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a mass vaccination site for farmworkers at the Sage Center in Boardman on March 24.

officials were offering doses to farmworkers in a four-day clinic that was the first of its kind.

"In order to not infect other people, to feel safe with your family and to be secure is what's most important," Corona said through a translator after getting her vaccine on March 24.

Akiko Saito, deputy director for the COVID-19 response and recovery unit, a joint division between the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Human Services, said the clinic was a "pilot project" specifically geared to immunize a community long understood to be especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

In all, officials vaccinated over 1,000 agricultural workers at the clinic, according to the Morrow County Health Department.

See **Ag workers** / A12



A driver waits in an observation area after receiving a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine during a vaccination clinic at the Sage Center in Boardman on March 24.

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Chicken producers to build large-scale operations in Oregon

BY SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press

Oregon will likely soon have two new large-scale chicken operations — one in the Scio-Jefferson area, the other in Aumsville.

Poultry producers contracted with Foster Farms plan to raise millions of broiler chickens at the operations. Proponents say the new sites will expand Northwest chicken production, meet demand for locally-produced protein and boost profits for contracted poultry growers.

But some locals, including neighboring farmers, fear the mega-operations will damage good soil, ruin views, pollute water and air and hurt surrounding property values.

Christina Eastman, 56, a Scio resident, called the expansions an "abomination."

Eric Simon, 51, a longtime poultry farmer, will run the Scio operation. Simon owns Ideal AG Supply, a dairy and poultry equipment company. In Brownsville, Simon has also been a contract grower for Foster Farms since 2000.



Courtesy of Christina Eastman

Christina Eastman, 56, a Scio resident from a multigenerational farming family, said she is concerned and "heartbroken" about the proposed Foster Farms expansion.

See **Chicken** / A12

Amazon vote may spark more union pushes

BY JOSEPH PISANI AND BILL BARROW
The Associated Press

What happens inside a warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, could have major implications not just for the country's second-largest employer but the labor movement at large.

Organizers are pushing for some 6,000 Amazon workers there to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union on the promise it will lead to better working conditions, better pay and more respect. Amazon is pushing back, arguing that it already offers more than twice the minimum wage in Alabama and workers get such benefits as health care, vision and dental insurance without paying union dues.

The two sides are fully aware that it's not just the Bessemer warehouse on the line. Organizers hope what happens there will inspire thousands of workers nationwide — and not just at Amazon — to consider unionizing and revive a labor movement that has been waning for decades.

See **Amazon** / A12