

Central Oregon | Wedding industry

Couples to stay afloat



Weddings can be added to long list of hard-hit industries during the pandemic

BY MICHAEL KOHN

The Bulletin

Before the pandemic upended the live events industry, Courtney Latham organized the entertainment for about 100 weddings a year. Brides and grooms danced the night away to the sounds spun by his company, Flip Flop Sounds.

Last year, that number was down to 10. Couples are still tying the knot, COVID-19

hasn't ended that tradition. But due to state-ordered limits on how many people can crowd together indoors, large weddings that draw guests in their hundreds were almost non-existent last year. The lack of the traditional wedding bash has torpedoed work for DJs, wedding planners, venues and florists.

Latham said it has been discouraging to cancel the party for many happy couples looking forward to their big day.

"My biggest fear was that we weren't go-

ing to be there for all the customers who had booked with us and hoped to have us at their wedding," said Latham. "That scared me more than anything else."

Despite a steady stream of vaccinations going into the arms of Oregonians, Latham and others say considerable uncertainty still surrounds the wedding industry, mainly due to the possibility of moving back to stricter risk categories.

See **Weddings** / C8



Robin Bernard helps Courtney Dickinson with a wedding dress at Cordially Invited Bridal in Bend.

Dean Guernsey/
The Bulletin

Oregon's labor gap: The next big hurdle in pandemic

With the hope that our risk level setback from spring break will pass quickly, businesses are gearing up for the summer and our long-awaited emergence from COVID-19. And as restaurants, the entertainment and recreation industry, hospitality and others prepare for more customers, they are finding that a lack of labor is their next big hurdle to overcome.

According to the Oregon Employment Department,

INSIDE BUSINESS

By Katy Brooks



Deschutes County has now recovered around 11,350 of the 16,400 jobs lost since the initial shutdown. This still represents double the unemployment numbers since pre-pandemic days in Oregon and they are finding that there are underlying issues to getting everyone

back to work.

Heather Ficht, director of East Cascade Works, a state workforce agency, says there are labor gaps in Central Oregon that are more persistent than the effects of the pandemic. She believes this is a trend that will carry into the future unless we prepare the workforce. "We not only need to address the shortage of labor today but plan for the expectation of about 16,500 new jobs in our region in the next 10 years," she said.

The Central Oregon Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Plan found job vacancy trends are more prevalent in certain industries and specific skill sets that are lacking for difficult-to-fill positions. These gaps may impact the workforce for years to come. Ficht thinks much of the problem is due to a shrinking labor pool. "This is a warm body issue: there is a high demand for labor relative to very few workers unemployed or sitting on the

sidelines," she said. The exit of Baby Boomers from the workforce is one of the largest culprits for this impending labor shortage. Ficht says training and skills development of the incoming workforce is needed now to help close the growing labor gap.

Short-term job vacancies are also causing havoc. Many in the current workforce is delaying reentry to the job market, exacerbating the labor shortage many businesses

are experiencing. Part of the issue may be that those with public-facing jobs are worried about exposure to COVID-19. However, with more employees, including front-line workers, having recently become eligible for a vaccine fears of exposure to COVID-19 may decrease, encouraging people to come back to work. Businesses can help by asking employees to get vaccinated and making it convenient for them to do so.

See **Brooks** / C8