

Malheur County grapples with acute labor shortage

BY PAT CALDWELL

Malheur Enterprise

At Brewsky's Broiler in Ontario, business is on a solid upswing.

In Vale, Mal's Diner routinely reaches its state-mandated COVID capacity for customers.

As fewer COVID-19 restrictions pay off for local restaurants with more customers, a tight local labor pool threatens to put a crimp in the modest boom.

Finding employees was a serious issue for many restaurant owners during the past four weeks and now has reached a critical mass.

"I have gone from selecting the right candidate to hire to this year begging anyone to apply," said Malinda Castleberry, owner of Mal's.

Kathy Saldana, owner of A Street Tavern in Vale and Quins Bar in Ontario, said she's never seen a labor shortage as severe as it is now.

"This is bad. It makes it to the point where you just kind of thank God you have team players, but you don't want to burn them out and you don't want to get burned out," said Saldana.

At Ogawa's Wicked Sushi, Burgers And Bowls in Ontario, a shortage of workers forced the restaurant to cut back its hours.

Cindy Lynch, co-owner of Brewsky's Broiler, also said her restaurant struggles to find employees. Lynch said she believes a combination of generous federal unemployment benefits and uncertainty regarding state COVID-19 restrictions keep potential employees at home.

"They think 'why would I take a job in a restaurant that



Cindy Lynch of Brewsky's Broiler in Ontario talks about the struggle to find employees even as business is rebounding.

Pat Caldwell/Malheur Enterprise

may get closed again," said Lynch.

Plaza Inn owner Jason Jungling said he, too, believes potential employees are apprehensive of COVID-19.

"You know, if I get a job at a restaurant, is my job safe with the next shutdown?" said Jungling.

Jungling encountered difficulty finding employees, though his core group — including three cooks — remained consistent through the shutdowns. That's been a saving grace, said Jungling, especially as business climbed. In March, he said, the Plaza Inn hit a record in terms of volume.

"In April, we've noticed a little bit of a drop-off. But business is still good. We are averaging \$3,000 a day and, on the weekend, \$4,000," said Jungling.

Shortage of workers was a problem before the pandemic hit, said Andrea Testi, director of the Treasure Valley Community College Small Business Development Center, but federal stimulus payouts are also not helping.

"It has been exacerbated, in

my opinion, because people are given a whole bunch of social service money not to go to work," said Testi.

Testi said it is "easier to collect unemployment and other types of financial ruminations to stay at home."

Testi said the worker shortage comes up frequently in conversations with the state of-

officials and local merchants.

The shortage of help is not limited to Malheur County, said Jungling.

"It is across the entire U.S. Everybody is having the same issue — whether it is hiring servers or cooks or dishwashers," he said.

Restaurants are also not the only local businesses suffering from lack of employees, said Barry Carlman of American Staffing, a Fruitland labor firm. "Nobody can hire anybody," said Carlman.

Carlman said last week he could offer 35 jobs with a starting wage between \$14 and \$18 an hour.

"They just sit there and take forever to fill," said Carlman. "We are used to filling 20 to 30 jobs a week and we are still filling 10 to 15 but I have clients dying for people."

Carlman said in 26 years "this is the hardest I've ever

seen it."

Carlman said the employee dearth can be traced to an array of factors.

"The unemployment rate is super low already," said Carlman.

March statistics from the state Employment Department show Malheur County reported a 5.3% unemployment rate. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Idaho unemployment rate in March was 3.2%.

Oregon unemployment rate, as of February, was 6.1%.

Carlman also pointed to stimulus cash as another element to the problem.

"That kind of disincentivizes people to work," he said.

COVID-19 also plays a role, he said.

"Some might be scared to be out in the workforce or have issues wearing a mask," said Carlman.

Solve these puzzles on C4

SOLUTION TO TODAY'S SUDOKU

7	3	4	2	6	1	8	9	5
2	5	1	4	8	9	6	3	7
6	8	9	3	7	5	4	2	1
3	4	2	5	9	7	1	8	6
9	7	8	6	1	2	5	4	3
5	1	6	8	3	4	2	7	9
4	2	7	1	5	3	9	6	8
8	9	5	7	2	6	3	1	4
1	6	3	9	4	8	7	5	2

SOLUTION TO TODAY'S JUMBLE

JUMBLE

Answer:

HIATUS INHALE SHROUD
GRILLE ACTUAL FUNNEL

The mom who held her kids in her arms loved —

RAISING HER CHILDREN

LAT CROSSWORD SOLUTION

T	A	B	U	A	T	E	C	R	O	W	A	R	I	S	I	N	G
A	V	O	N	L	A	B	A	M	B	A	C	O	N	I	C	A	L
P	E	O	P	L	E	P	E	R	S	O	N	C	O	G	N	A	T
S	O	R	C	E	R	E	R	S	E	L	L	E	F	A	N	N	I
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S	T	R	A	S	S	E	M	A	L	W	A	R	E	M	O	T	T

NYT CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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P	E	C	O	R	I	N	O	C	H	E	E	S	E	S	C	O	T
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E	N	C	O	D	E	R	A	S	S	L	E	D	H	I	Y	A	L
A	B	I	D	E	S	E	L	L	G	L	U	T	E	N	F	R	E
S	O	F	F	R	E	A	K	I	N	G	L	I	N	G			
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V	A	N	I	T	I	M	E	A	N	I	T	S	O	Y	E	A	H
A	I	D	E	C	O	E	D	S	D	O	M	E	A	R	G	O	
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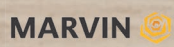


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