

'The Cook' finds new home in Prairie City

El Cocinero offers extensive Mexican menu

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

PRAIRIE CITY — Fernando Leal is back in business, running El Cocinero Restaurant in Prairie City.

Leal is "El Cocinero" — Spanish words that translate to "the cook."

He's been cooking in restaurants for 20 years, whipping up a wide variety of dishes.

He opened El Cocinero in John Day in 2006, and after the city of John Day bought the property where his restaurant was located to build a fire station, he closed down and moved out of the area for a time.

Leal found the new location in Prairie City when another Mexican restaurant switched locations.

The building was also once



Fernando Leal of El Cocinero in Prairie City serves a customer a crispy taco salad on Jan. 11.

Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter

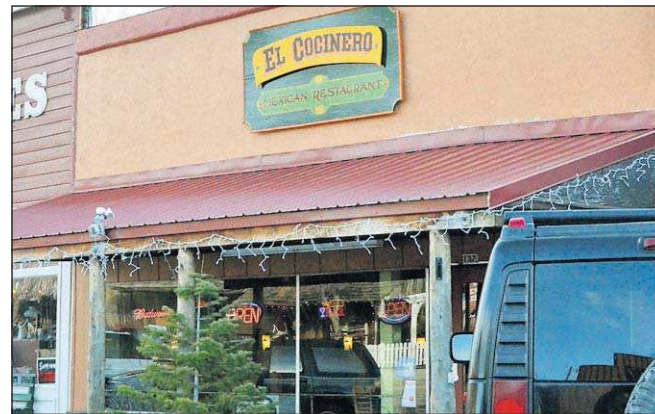
home to the Branding Iron Restaurant and Lounge, and still features the familiar brands from local ranchers, along with Latin American decor.

The El Cocinero menu has remained the same, and there are still daily specials.

Customer favorites include macho burritos, molé enchi-

ladas and crazy chicken, Leal said.

Other menu items include chimichangas, carne asada, fajitas, tostadas, tamales,



El Cocinero is a family restaurant in Prairie City with a Mexican flair.

flautas, salads and seafood selections, as well as Mexican desserts.

If a customer prefers, Leal also has hamburgers and steaks available.

Leal said he enjoys every aspect of the restaurant business: cooking, serving customers and cleaning the dishes.

He still has a sombrero for birthday celebrations.

"I like it when people choose my restaurant for their

birthday — I'll sing 'Happy Birthday' to them," he said.

"Business is good, so far," Leal said, adding the pace is busier with a bar at the back of the family restaurant.

"I appreciate everyone's support of the business," Leal said.

El Cocinero is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Mondays through Saturdays, at 137 W. Front St. in Prairie City. For more information, call the restaurant at 541-820-4414.

TOWN

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City Recorder Corry Rider, whose office is across the street, said, "We have an outrageous park."

Rider doesn't live in Canyon City, but said, "I definitely feel like I'm part of the city."

"It's a great place to work, with a great council and great people," he said.

Canyon City's biggest annual gala is the '62 Days Celebration in June commemorating the discovery of gold in 1862.

The celebration includes the Gold Rush Run and Walk and McKalee's Walk and Jog. Organized by the Whiskey Gulch Gang, '62 Days has been held every year since 1922.

Other events in recent years have included the Oregon State Cowboy Fast Draw Championships, which will be held this year the first



The Eagle/Cheryl Hoefler

This mural that graces the Guernsey building north of Sproul Park in Canyon City is one of two painted in 1996 by Larry Kangas. It depicts a Fourth of July parade making its way down Canyon City's Washington Street in the 1890s. Kangas based the painting on a photograph of an 1886 Canyon City parade he found in a Portland museum.

weekend in June, and the Aces for Faces Motorcycle Poker Run.

Humbolt Elementary, part of Grant School District No. 3, has an enrollment of 310 students in grades K-6. Canyon City is also home to Grant County Child Care Center, which offers pre-

school education.

The town has the notoriety of burning three times in its history — in 1870, 1898 and 1937. Each time, the resilient residents rallied and rebuilt their community.

Today, Canyon City is governed by Mayor Steve Fischer, City Coun-



The Eagle/Cheryl Hoefler

Sproul Park is the site of summer concerts and other community events throughout the year.

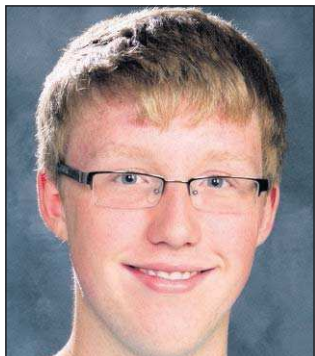
cil President Jim Johnson and Councilors Rachelle Simmons, Don Mooney, Jason Hatfield and Diane Blake.

City council meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month.

For more information, call Canyon City City Hall at 541-575-0509.



Emma Hettinga



Dawson Quinton

ELKS SCHOLARS ANNOUNCED

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The John Day Elks Lodge No. 1824 scholarship chairman, Connie Wood, announced the Elks Most Valuable Student Scholarship winners.

Out of 10 Grant County applicants, three boys and three girls will advance to the district level to be judged with other Eastern Oregon senior students.

The first-place boy is Dawson Quinton of Grant Union, and the first-place girl is Emma Hettinga of Dayville School. They each received a check for \$250 from the lodge.

Other winners are: Amaya Zwegardt of Prairie City School, Jamie Waltenburg of Dayville School, Garrett Hitz of Prairie City School and Wyatt Weaver of Grant Union.

Judging the applications were Ken Peterson, Nita Van Voorhis and Vera Shoberg.

"I want to say thank you to

each of them," Wood said. "I really appreciate the time they take to help with this."

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