

Oregon RAIN lending a hand

Nonprofit organization aims to catalyze entrepreneurial ecosystem

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

COVID-19 continues to provide many uncertainties for the future, but what is certain is the continuous work and help Oregon RAIN provides for Grant County.

Oregon RAIN is a nonprofit organization that partners with Oregon communities to catalyze an entrepreneurial ecosystem and connect entrepreneurs to resources and information to create a prosperous community.

RAIN only comes into communities when they are invited, and they were invited by Grant County Economic Development.

After the invitation, the other stakeholders that partnered with the county and their invitation were John Day, Prairie City and Canyon City.

Interviews were held, and Stephanie LeQuieu was chosen to be a

rural venture catalyst to represent the community. She began working in February.

"What we do is connect entrepreneurs to resources, whether it's services that they need like education or training, or people like mentors, or capital," LeQuieu said. "We help find means for them to gain capital or resources to start their ventures."

To help people in the county receive resources, LeQuieu researches the local communities and finds out what is already provided. She also meets with city leaders and officials to ask them about the needs in the cities.

She also finds people, or people reach out to her, who are local entrepreneurs with great ideas but who don't know how get to the next level.

COVID-19 forced a shift to online content and connecting with people through online workshops, conferences and support groups. LeQuieu said her team made the change quickly, and she was impressed with the team.

"We started a workshop series



Contributed photo

Stephanie LeQuieu, Grant County's Oregon RAIN rural venture catalyst, connects entrepreneurs with resources.

are still helping entrepreneurs and brainstorming of startups of how they can survive at this time." Every Monday from 2-3 p.m., RAIN offers a virtual workshop series online through Zoom. This workshop is based on feedback from the local network. Every Friday from 9-10 a.m., RAIN provides an online entrepreneur support group through Zoom. These resources can be found at oregonrain.org.

LeQuieu also provides an additional three online virtual meetings a week where entrepreneurs can ask her questions, and she helps them anyway she can. These are provided on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

While RAIN's mission is to help build an entrepreneurial ecosystem, local partners have also asked how RAIN can help current local businesses during the pandemic.

"Some of the city leaders have asked what I can do for business retention and expansion, and I think, now more than ever, it is a key component to what needs to be done," LeQuieu said. "I have been

reaching out to local businesses to see if there is anything I can do. A lot of the content we provide in our workshop will apply to existing businesses."

As of March there have been 15 entrepreneurs that have been identified in the county who have reached out, according to LeQuieu. She added, even in the midst of the pandemic, there is one entrepreneur who she is helping in the process of starting a business.

"Oregon RAIN is helping, it's working here and we are going to reap the benefits having an organization like this partner with us," LeQuieu said. "Grant County has some phenomenal talent here. They have wonderful ideas and I have seen a great response. It's been a wonderful experience so far."

LeQuieu said she appreciates the opportunity to get to know entrepreneurs on a personal level and one of her main goals is to help and affect positive change.

For more information, call 541-965-1598 or email stephanie@oregonrain.org.

Canyon City finds growth through local efforts

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Canyon City's legacy is golden and rich with history, but the city's future is just as precious this year.

Canyon City Mayor Steve Fischer talked about the repairs the city has completed through local efforts, the new people coming into town and taxes going down for residents in Canyon City. The park is one area that has a new addition planned.

"We are planning on annexing our park over on the north side of city hall, and we tore down the shop there and began culminating some ideas on what people would like to see there," Fischer said. "So far, we understand that people want to have a spot to put a band, but there are a lot of different ideas to consider."

As of now, the city is working on finding a mason to repair a rock wall that is on the city hall side of Sels Brewery and making it safe. The project has been budgeted, and with a mason that just moved into Canyon City, it seems the project has potential to finish this summer.

The city has also



Eagle file photo

On July 24, the Grant County Court agreed to split out-of-pocket expenses to repair and upgrade the Inland Street Bridge with Canyon City.

focused on working on the Nugget and Inland street bridges and making repairs. The Inland bridge was the first to receive repairs and an upgrade this past August. The 27-foot long, two-lane bridge saw repairs made after passing logs damaged the bridge during flooding in April. The bridge was also raised 2 feet higher for protection.

For Fischer, this project

highlighted the strength in completing a project this big using local resources and people, which saved money for the city. To repair the bridge, the city was approved for a federal grant for \$1.13 million with a match of \$130,000. The city turned the grant down because of the match needed.

The city then decided to fix the bridge themselves and got an estimate of

\$76,500 for the job.

"We got the whole thing done for just over \$61,000, paved and everything," Fischer said. "To me, it just goes to show what you can do if you use the people and resources that you have around you, and the county helped us out tremendously because they paid for half of the project."

The county helped since Inland Street bridge is needed to provide access for residents at the north end of Humbolt Street and to bus students to Humbolt Elementary School.

The Nugget bridge is the next project that will be started in the near future. Fischer said the city was hoping to get the project finished this year, but the city will be ready for the state grant they plan to apply for in 2021.

When it comes to finances, the city recently paid off two 40-year bonds with one to improve the water system and the other to improve the sewer system.

"We paid them up a year early so Canyon City can look at a little less in local taxes on the town," Fischer said.

A big goal the city plans



Eagle file photo

Canyon City Mayor Steve Fischer and his wife, Shelley, in downtown Canyon City during '62 Days in 2019.



Eagle file photo

Canyon City Public Works Director Les Percy, right, and two Grant County employees, Zane Rookstool, left, and Tyrell Sharp, work on the Inland Street bridge abutment Aug. 8.

to accomplish is putting in a new reservoir to provide the best water in the best way possible for the city, according to Fischer.

"We are looking into a new reservoir because these (current reservoirs) are so old, and we had done temporary repairs a time or two, but it's not holding anymore," Fischer said.

The city is looking into a single reservoir and filter system that will replace two reservoirs. Fischer said the city received a \$20,000 grant for planning. Like Inland bridge, the plan is to pay for the project in house and not raise taxes or get another bond, according to Fischer.

"We are doing the best we can with the resources we have to take on one project at a time and get it done," Fischer said. "Our plan is to stay focused and keep our streets good, keep the infrastructure maintained and it's working."

The city has also seen

growth with four new homes built in the last year and a half and contractors looking to build more on Canyon Mountain Heights. While more people are moving in, Fischer said an important focus for the city is to maintain a small city and hometown feel.

"People are building around here, and they are retiring here and they tell me that they like this small town feel," Fischer said.

With so much accomplished, Fischer said he has the best city council and workers who helped and cooperated to complete big projects, and he is excited to see new construction and new people.

"New people scare some of the local people because they are city people, but the idea is that these people live in the city that really aren't city people by heart and want to live in a small town when they retire and get out of the city," said Fischer.



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Grant SWCD Weed Control Dept. Working for You in 2020



Thanks to the Grant County Court and Northeast Oregon Forests Resource Advisory Committee, Grant Weed Control is able to offer a **50% Cost Share Program for Noxious Weed Control on Private Grazing Lands, through a Title II funded Grant Project.** This program will provide a maximum \$5,000 of noxious weed control services with a \$2,500 maximum landowner contribution to qualifying participants. To be eligible for participation, the treatment property must not be actively irrigated and must be primarily managed for livestock grazing, minimum of 20 acres in size, located within Grant County, and must contain weed species listed on the Grant County Noxious Weed List. Applications for this limited weed control assistance opportunity will be funded on a first come first serve basis.

Applications due by June 5th.

Contact the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District Office at (541) 575-1554 or visit 721 S. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845 for applications and additional information.

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