

Eastern Oregon leaders react to plan to reopen Oregon

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

State Reps. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, and state Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, talked about the fallout from Gov. Kate Brown's three-phase plan to open businesses during a virtual town hall hosted by Findley on May 7.

While Oregon may soon begin to reopen, the legislators agreed that this does not mean things are going back to normal. Findley said, while counties have submit-



Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale

ted plans for reopening to the state for approval, Phase 1 still won't begin until May 15 at the earliest for some counties.

Findley said hearing the governor's plan was difficult. "We've been proceeding down a path to try and meet some Phase 1 guidelines and get people back to work ... and a little bit of that



Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane

was modified today," Bonham said. "Goal posts were changed, and areas of the state were not reflected in the guidelines. (I) certainly did not anticipate statements of large group activities not happening prior to the end of September."

Brown announced on May 7 that all large gatherings, such as sporting events

and fairs, will not be allowed until the state has access to a vaccine or reliable treatment for COVID-19.

"The Oregon Health Authority is advising that any large gathering of these through September should either be canceled or significantly modified," Brown said.

Findley pointed out that county fairs would not be available until Phase 3, which is cause for concern.

"Now the governor's office did say today that they would like to give the ability for counties to figure out how to have

their livestock events so youth can raise them and somehow figure out how to show them and sell because most of that money goes to educational purposes," Findley said. "I asked the governor about the Pendleton Round-Up, and it does not look favorable."

Owens said all of the counties in House District 60 have submitted their plans for reopening.

Findley said cooperation between state legislators, counties and cities has been one positive result from COVID-19. "The three of us hold

bi-weekly phone calls with all the county commissioners in Senate District 30," Findley said. "We have lengthy calls, and everyone speaks and everyone talks. We plot, share information and work on scenarios on how we can move forward."

Findley noted several times that Phase 1 for reopening will not begin until May 15, and only then for counties whose plans have been approved by the state. Some of the businesses that may reopen are restaurants, bars, select retail stores and salons.

Restaurant adapts to survive amid coronavirus pandemic

Wholesale grocery sales filling the dine-in void

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

While the country finds itself in an era where toilet paper, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes are in short supply as COVID-19 continues to ransack the U.S. economy, a couple of local small business have shown there is a surplus of hope and business savvy, especially when it comes to accommodating the changes in the way the community buys food.

The outbreak has led local restaurants to shutter their dining rooms temporarily, with some transitioning to takeout or delivery. For Squeeze-In Restaurant owner Shawn Duncan, neither would work for her business and clientele.

Instead, on the advice of her sales representative from her restaurant supply company, she has been selling hard-to-find food service items wholesale — from flour and yeast to toilet paper and paper towels — to people in the community.

Duncan said, at first, she was not sold on the idea of selling food and restaurant supply items out of the Squeeze-In.

"At first, I said no, I'm a restaurant, not a grocery store, so then he said think about it for a few days," Duncan said. "Then I thought about it, and I said, what the heck, I'm not doing anything anyway, and then it just blew up."

Duncan said the revenue stream has allowed her to keep up on operating costs and essentials without depleting what she has in savings or requiring her to take out additional loans. As it was, she said she had applied for the Small Business Administration's



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Shawn Duncan, the owner of the Squeeze-In Restaurant, chats with a customer May 5. Duncan, who opted to close the Squeeze-In temporarily when Gov. Kate Brown mandated restaurants statewide to close or switch to takeout to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, shifted to selling grocery items and food service supplies.

Payroll Protection Program loan, but never heard back.

Selling groceries is helping Duncan's restaurant supplier, Sysco, the nation's largest food service distributor. The company said it cut more

than a third of its employees in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The Houston-based company, in addition to supplying restaurants, took a huge blow, losing revenue streams as institutional cafeterias,

schools and large events shuttered in March.

Duncan takes orders through Facebook, by phone and text message and has an order form on Google Docs. She said orders need to be placed by noon Sundays and Wednesdays for Monday and Thursday pickups from noon to 5 p.m. at the restaurant.

She said roughly 50 people from around the county have been ordering from her each week.

Duncan said people have been most grateful for items like flour and yeast.

"They have more time to prepare their own food with the stay-at-home and social distancing orders," Duncan said.

Having the option to get the products locally not only keeps revenue in the county, but also lessens the amount of trips outside of the area.

Longtime Squeeze-In customer Howard Geiger, who

traveled from the end of Pine Creek Road to pick up his groceries, said the transformation to a store has allowed him to avoid trips to big box retailers in Bend or Ontario, thus eliminating the risk of contracting the virus.

The unlikely win-win partnership between a small business like the Squeeze-In and a multinational corporation like Sysco is part of a growing trend of restaurants, both big and small across the country, that are not going down without a fight as the hospitality industry struggles to survive the worst of the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Grocery sales are part of a fast-growing offensive to save the industry as analysts and operators have been quoting an estimate that 75% of the independent restaurants that have been closed to protect Americans from the coronavirus won't make it.

Sheriff, district attorney won't enforce business closures, but OSHA still issuing fines

OSHA: 'It is our expectation that employers comply with the governor's executive order'

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Although the district attorney and sheriff said last week they will not enforce requirements or prosecute business owners for defying state orders to remain closed, businesses still run the risk of fines from the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration and other governing agencies.

"It is our expectation that employers comply with the governor's executive order," said Aaron Corvin, OSHA's Public Information Officer. "Those businesses that are able to operate need to take appropriate steps to protect their employees from a recognized hazard."

A willful violation of OSHA rules carries a minimum fine of \$8,900, according to the agency's guidance.

Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter said that some businesses, such as hair salons, are licensed

through the state and need to be mindful of the risks should they plan to reopen.

"I only have the authority to deal with crimes in the state," not regulatory agencies, Carpenter said.

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said businesses regulated by state licensure agencies are not his jurisdiction.

"Those typically are health or other regulatory agencies that I am not getting involved in," Palmer said. "Those agencies typically have administrative processes that deal with violations and are typically horribly severe."

Carpenter said, despite his decision to not prosecute business owners who decide not to follow the governor's directives, he does not want to trivialize the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I believe that prevention is worth something in everything we do," Palmer said. "From personal hygiene to personal choices, there are consequences for not taking preven-



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer at County Court April 22. Palmer issued a statement May 5 that his office will ease social distancing restrictions and not enforce the governor's stay-home orders.

tative measures in everything we do."

Carpenter said he is not telling business owners to open if they are concerned about the virus. He said he realizes how politically polarizing the COVID-19 pandemic has become in the last couple of months.

"A certain type of political animal always finds something

to boost its platform," Carpenter said. "I'm not picking any specific group." He said that "political animal" exists on both sides of the political aisle.

"Was it over blown or politically polarized? I am not sure, but I think that the response and mandates we see in areas of little to no cases are unjustified and unwarranted," Palmer said. "With the political cli-



Contributed photo

District Attorney Jim Carpenter said his office will not prosecute business owners who defy the governor's stay-home orders.

mate across out state and nation right now, there is a lot of distrust in government from a lot of people."

Politics aside, Carpenter said the closures to businesses and the stay-home orders have become more damaging to the community.

"The cure is more damaging at this point," Carpenter said. Palmer said requiring those

who are not sick, or known to be exposed, to close their businesses or to maintain social distance is not justifiable in Grant County.

"We are mandating locals to close their businesses but yet we see people here from out of the area in Washington, Idaho and California plated vehicles that apparently have the freedom to travel as they will," he said. "If we are requiring locals and taking them to task on opening a business, how can we justify those that are coming here or merely passing through?"

Palmer said his office would resume full service functions, including fingerprinting and concealed handgun licenses, but jail visits will not resume yet.

"The sheriff's office is an essential service, and we didn't have to take the precautions we did, but being a public safety agency, we believed it would be prudent to take safety measures because of the amount of people come into contact with and some of the people we contact are what we consider high risk for exposure to a lot of illnesses," Palmer said.

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