

# Don't forget local merchants

This year it is more important than ever to shop local.

The push by chambers of commerce and others to get people to spend their money locally is not a new concept, but the fact COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on many small merchants across the state means a plan to spend money on Main Street this year is crucial.

Many small businesses in Oregon faced a bewildering array of challenges as the pandemic rolled across the state. From temporary closures to new social distancing standards, small businesses were pushed into a tough situation.

Government bailout funds helped. Programs, such as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, gave millions of small business owners the opportunity to offset some of their losses, but the federal and state programs designed to help sometimes proved to be difficult to access.

Most small business are on terribly thin margins to begin with. That is the nature of small businesses, at least early on in their lives. That means they can't weather a long-term financial blow as easily as a major corporation.

That's where residents come in. There is no doubt that online shopping is easy

and popular, but there is something to be said for the kind of one-on-one contact a person can receive when they visit a small local business.

Even if the small merchant does not have the item a person might want in stock, they can order it. In the end, the cash you place down for that product stays local and helps the town merchant.

A small business that succeeds is more likely to hire residents. Those residents then spend more money in the community. Those local merchants also pay taxes, and those taxes are funneled into local projects and spending.

The truth is this year our small-town merchants need our help more than ever. There is hope on the horizon in the form of a vaccine to curb COVID-19. Best estimates, though, push the vaccine out to months before it is readily available.

In the meantime, our local merchants, the people you may know and care about, must weather months of challenges.

We can help those small business in town. And the solution isn't a complicated one. It is simple: shop local.

As the holiday season rolls around and you are looking for that important gift, don't forget your local merchants.



## GUEST COMMENT

# Supporting rural economies and our food supply

Fairly early in the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon agriculture faced an economic crisis largely out of its control. News stories featured milk being dumped in the Midwest, and large meatpacking facilities shut down for unsafe practices and a very sick workforce.

Meanwhile, here in rural Oregon, schoolchildren weren't getting milk in their lunches, onion growers were dumping high-value product that lacked a market and ranchers confronted a falling beef market while urban families struggled.

This squeeze where grocery store shelves are nearly bare, and quality Oregon agricultural products go to waste is fundamentally a "supply chain problem."

Three cold words for a comprehensive crisis that puts ranchers in danger of going out of business, and risks families going hungry because they can't afford to buy hamburger at the grocery store.

We — Sen. Wyden and the Oregon Cattlemen's Association — have been working together for more than a decade on a project to solve this squeeze and allow more opportunities for ranchers to sell safe and high-quality beef into the retail market. Sometimes an emergency adds the incentive to get off the sidelines and change a stubborn paradigm. Using a Farm Bill program, the state of Oregon is in the process of adopting a meat inspection program equivalent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's.



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon



Tom Sharp

Sen. Wyden has been actively and strongly encouraging the USDA to work with Oregon ranchers and the state on this solution.

Oregon cattlemen have been working to raise political capital, help define market and regulatory issues so that ranchers ultimately have more flexibility and certainty, and Oregon families have beef on the table.

We also need to recognize state Reps. David Brock-Smith and Mark Owens for putting a state meat inspection bill front and center and getting it passed in the Oregon Legislature.

We want to assure you all that in all of our conversations we strive for a win that benefits everybody. We are working toward a solution that would allow smaller, more regional meat processing facilities in our rural communities that meet all USDA standards for health and safety. This is vital to protect the consumers, and ranchers who only want to sell the best quality beef to their customers.

We'll reduce the carbon footprint since cattle won't be transported hundreds of miles and sometimes across state lines for slaughter and inspection and then re-transported need-

lessly back to the community for sale. If there's another health crisis in the large meat-packing plants, we will have rural infrastructure in place to ensure food systems do not collapse or even falter. And we will protect Oregon agriculture, which can operate on a razor-thin margin, particularly in the past few years when it's suffered historic snowstorms, floods, drought and wildfires.

It's important for us to state unequivocally that Oregon agriculture has a place at the table when it comes to solving issues of food security and climate change.

Improving soil health, landscape improvements to reduce invasive and fire-prone grasses, improving and protecting fragile ecosystems and habitats, and creating innovative food networks. These are great opportunities for Oregon agriculture to contribute — feeding us all and protecting our lands.

As the state Department of Agriculture works through the important regulatory process to establish this new and innovative program, we will continue to work together to support agriculture infrastructure dollars, to identify markets and support new technologies. We hope you will join us in recognizing the importance of food security, new markets and protecting our traditional economies.

Ron Wyden is a U.S. Senator from Oregon. Tom Sharp is the President of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association.

## GUEST COMMENT

# Chamber planning for future

The year 2020 is winding down, and what a ride it has been, with the coronavirus-related restrictions and regulations affecting nearly every business in our county. Our hospitality businesses — motels, restaurants and venues like the fairgrounds — have been particularly struck by the significant disruptions in tourism.

At the Grant County Chamber of Commerce, we haven't let the pandemic stop us from working on plans to improve our tourism outreach and strategies and help those businesses in the future.

We recognize that many of our merchants rely on tourist dollars to make their businesses strong, and that in turn helps them serve the local community. We also know that this crisis, while it has lasted longer than anyone hoped, is not permanent. With medical precautions now and a vaccine in the future, we are hoping for a return to a normal tourism season next year. Who knows, with a pent-up demand for travel, the next season could be bigger than ever.

During the past eight months, the chamber board and marketing committee have pushed ahead with the following projects so we can all work together for a strong start:

- Creation of a logo for Grant County, to be used by the chamber and any of the cities or community organizations that are promoting events. The logo features the founding date, 1864, as well as a compass symbol to signify the importance of history and geography in our community values. A city name can be added to "personalize" the logo.



Sherrie Rininger

The logo is already featured on lapel pins, coffee mugs and caps, which will be sold at the chamber office and also will be available for local businesses to sell.

The project included drafting of a guide for best use of the logo in promotional materials to attain a cohesive look and presentation for the county.

- Design of new banners for street poles, incorporating the new logo and artwork representative of the region. An initial order of example banners has arrived at the chamber and will be posted so communities can take a look and see how they might add to their street décor. The chamber will provide the first four banners free to any Grant County community that wants to participate.

As part of the banner and logo planning, the marketing committee felt it was important to feature work by artists from this area, reflecting Grant County, rather than generic artwork from some graphics agency. To that end, a painting of a bluebird on a branch by local artist Mike Stinnett was the first of four pieces chosen for the initial rollout. The chamber expects to seek new artwork and feature more artists in future years, as the banner program expands.

- Creation of a branding strategy that will be the basis of future marketing efforts, provide a focal point for community pride, and present a distinct voice for our marketing

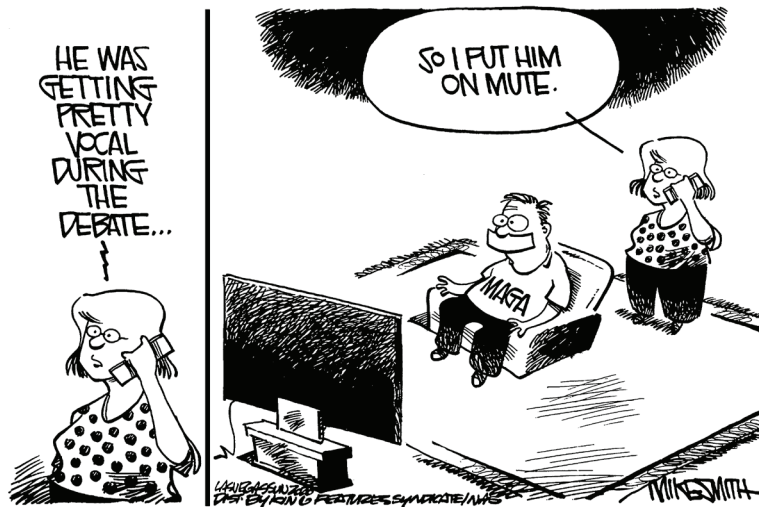
efforts on behalf of Grant County, its businesses and its communities. That project is ongoing, with our marketing volunteers led by consultants Joni Kabana and Dardi Troen. We expect to finalize this work over the fall and winter, and use it to guide our future advertising and marketing campaigns.

- Promotion of our county as a great place to visit — and live in. An eye-catching new ad, featuring a spectacular photo by Kabana of the North Fork of the John Day River valley at Kimberly, is going to press for the next Eastern Oregon Visitors Association travel guide and the Travel Oregon magazine. It also will run in the Blue Mountain Eagle's annual Explore Grant County guide, which is distributed widely to visitor centers across the state.

The full-color ad encourages travelers to "Give Yourself Some Space" and lists a dozen Grant County communities ready to welcome visitors.

All of these efforts aim to help our businesses not just survive, but thrive next year, and the years after that. Our county needs all of its industries — timber, agriculture and small business — to be strong. Visitors can play an important role for our local businesses, and these projects are evidence of your chamber's continuing commitment to Grant County. We look forward to working with our communities and merchants in 2021, as we emerge from a challenging year truly "Grant County Strong."

Sherrie Rininger is the president of the Grant County Chamber of Commerce.



## WHERE TO WRITE

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- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
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  - **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
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  - **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
  - **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.
  - **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.
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