

Afghan

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was nearing the end of his eight-month deployment, the two had discussed that Hussein's life would be in danger as the U.S. evacuated. He was receiving threats against his life. He knew his time was almost up. Paullus wanted to help.

A 30-year member of the Oregon Army National Guard, Paullus wrote a letter sponsoring Hussein as he immigrated to the U.S. with his family. He liked Hussein and vouched for his character, work ethic and financial stability. With Paullus' help, Hussein received approval from the federal government in 2019 to move to America with his wife and three daughters. Now he lives in San Diego County, selling jewelry to get by.

"He felt that, when the U.S. does leave, he and his family would potentially be in harm's way," said Paullus, 47, a parole and probation officer for Umatilla County Community Corrections. "But as long as he was there, he wanted to see that good things were done, and he did his part to do as much as he could for his country. At the end of the day, if he wasn't able to get his U.S. citizenship, he would have dealt with it as many of his friends currently are."

Running in circles

In recent weeks, Hussein has been glued to his phone. From nearly 7,800 miles away, he has watched the Taliban seize the city where he grew up. He seldom goes to work, despite his expensive rent.

He takes calls from friends and family members, most of whom worked for the U.S. and fear the worst. Just a few weeks ago, he received images from his brother, who he said was beaten by the Taliban while on a grocery run.

(Hussein provided the East Oregonian with videos and recordings as evidence of his family's account. He asked the newspaper not to publish those images out of fear the Taliban would find his family.)

Meanwhile, Paullus talks to Hussein every week as he and his family attempt to navigate the maze of U.S. immigration and its mountain of paperwork. Paullus said he recently wrote a letter to Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, urging for his support in the safe evacuation of Hussein's family. He said he feels a responsibility to Hussein's family.

"I wish there was more I could do for Hussein and his family," he said. "During COVID, the majority of the (immigration) offices are closed. Everything has to be done through email. Very few offices have anyone that answers the phones. It goes to

a voice message. I can feel his frustration with the process and the circles he's running in."

A waiting game

Their story is not unique. Servicemen nationwide have been calling on dignitaries to support the safe and quick withdrawal of Afghan allies at risk of the Taliban's retribution amid the U.S. evacuation.

The U.S. has called Afghan military interpreters and other close U.S. allies a priority group in the withdrawal. Yet American officials are rejecting some Afghan allies to give priority to U.S. citizens and green card holders, The New York Times has reported.

Many of those allies, including Hussein's family, are waiting for Special Immigrant Visas. But only a fraction of the tens of thousands of Afghans who worked for the U.S. government or U.S. organizations and applied for those visas have been evacuated as the Taliban has rolled into Kabul.

The Times estimates that at least 250,000 Afghans eligible for expedited American visas remain in Afghanistan.

'They treated me like family'

In 2014, Paullus deployed with 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry, out of Springfield to Kabul, where he would serve for eight months. Upon arrival, he remarked on the city's con-

gested traffic, its Soviet-era structures, its nightlife and its air, polluted with arsenic and lead.

As Joint Operations Sergeant Major at the New Kabul Compound, his team's mission was the security of Kabul. They secured the city's entry points, escorted dignitaries and contractors and provided base security for the compound. Among their many projects, they helped reconstruct a park that had been damaged by artillery fire and set up barriers to protect polling sites during elections.

Paullus met Hussein in 2014. As a projects manager, he worked with Hussein, a contractor, at the New Kabul Compound. Hussein cooked meals and helped improve the base's infrastructure, building walls, gates and connecting wires and cable. He also had a small gift shop on the base, where Paullus would often stop by to chat.

Most of Hussein's family worked for the U.S. Armed Forces. It was how they made a living in a city where finding good-paying work is difficult.

Prior to working for the government, Hussein worked eight hours a day for \$5 an hour cleaning his neighbor's home and taking care of their chickens. He said it was just enough to pay for bread, electricity and rent. When he went to work for the armed forces, he made as much as \$500 a month.

"At least I could feed my

family," he said, adding that servicemen such as Paullus "treated me like family."

To Paullus, Hussein was a clear professional who believed in the U.S.'s mission in Afghanistan. They shared values: Hussein as a muslim and Paullus with a faith in a higher power. He appreciated Hussein's straight-forward demeanor and how he helped his community, traits he likened to his own. Over meals and tea, the two became friends, speaking often of their families and children.

"His religion and him being in Afghanistan had nothing to do with me liking him or not," Paullus said. "It was about the person and the quality they show."

Yearning to do more

The war in Afghanistan ended Aug. 30 with the final evacuation flights out of the Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul. Nearly 130,000 people were airlifted from the country, according to the Associated Press.

Most of Hussein's family, including his mother and father, remain stuck. But a lucky few, like his brother and other extended family members, escaped with the military to neighboring countries and America. He said he feels some semblance of relief, but his wife, whose family remains in the country, cries through the night.

Watching the news unfold, Paullus recognizes that leaving Afghanistan had been the plan from the beginning. Three consecutive U.S. presidents had said it was. He said he believes the evacuation should have been done sooner, but it's not his place to question the manner of the pullout.

"This was what the plan was," Paullus said. "We knew there were going to be repercussions to that plan one way or another as a country."

Now that the U.S. has departed, Paullus said he hopes the U.S. intensifies its efforts to bring to safety those who were integral to its mission.

"With anyone in his situation, you wish that you could do more to help them," Paullus said. "It'd be interesting to meet a person that wouldn't. Because you know that the potential for end of life is a reality for them, because of their close support of U.S. forces."

When Paullus told Hussein he was preparing to head back home to Eastern Oregon at the end of his eight-month deployment in 2015, the Afghan brought him a gift: a kiruk knife with a handle made of rock coral, obsidian and jade. Paullus keeps the blade in a safe at his home in Pendleton.

Inscribed along the side in Dari, Afghanistan's most common language, it says: "As friends we part."

Workers

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down the brewery on Tuesdays to keep what employees she has from becoming overwhelmed in an industry well known for its high turnover rate and low wages.

"I think we've reached the mindset of 'we have what we have,'" she said. "We'll keep hiring as much as possible, but we need to understand that we've got to adjust with what the situation is instead of waiting for the situation to adjust itself."

No chance for profit

Millar is not alone. Several restaurants across the region have reported challenges with hiring workers over the summer. Some blamed expanded federal unemployment benefits as the culprit for lower workforce participation, even though the region has seen lower unemployment benefits claims now than it had before the pandemic started. Others recognized the high cost of living, taxes and low supply of housing that has made rents and home prices balloon.

Millar said, while business



EO Media Group/Alex Wittwer

Head manager Caitlyn Foley plates up dishes in the kitchen at Terminal Gravity Brewery and Pub on Sept. 2. In a normal summer, Terminal Gravity Brewing would be busy all days of the week serving up local, handcrafted beers and traditional brewpub fare, but due to the labor shortage the company had to cut hours during its lunch rush and close down on Tuesdays.

picked up considerably over the summer, the lack of staffing and overburdened industry has a cascading effect with other restaurants, causing a feedback loop of demand and short supply. As one business cuts its hours, patrons look elsewhere for a meal.

"It's a funny, weird thing where I think we would all be excited if there were three

more restaurants because we just need more places to send people to eat, so it's a unique situation over here," Millar said.

Earlier this summer, Baker City's Main Event Sports Bar and Eatery was experiencing severe worker burnout in June due to staffing shortages, which led to closing the restaurant on Tuesdays.

every single week because we are so short staffed."

Rolling with the punches

For Bruce Rogers, COVID-19 has presented the challenge of keeping two businesses profitable. He and his daughter, Harvest Rogers, own both Timber's Feedery in Elgin and Local Harvest in La Grande.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unimaginable challenges in staffing for both restaurants. With the shortage of workers and revolving mandates for public dining, the owners have adjusted to rolling with the punches.

"This far into it and with what we've seen, the rules have changed and the rules are different and will change again," Bruce Rogers said. "We're just chameleons at this point. We just change and go with the flow while doing our best to remain a profitable business."

On top of the shortage of workers, Timber's Feedery is facing a hurdle as Harvest Rogers takes maternity leave. She said she typically works open to close every day, and her absence has forced Timber's to limit orders to take-out and outdoor dining for the time being.

Closing indoor dining is a technique that the owners used on both restaurants to save costs with a limited staff during the early part of the pandemic. They looked at new ideas in order to stay afloat during unstable times.

"When you couldn't have inside dining, we switched over to to-go and delivery only," Bruce Rogers said. "We had to start up a delivery service to remain competi-

tive at that point, but when we opened back up again we shut the delivery off."

Both Timber's Feedery and Local Harvest changed hours from seven days a week to five days a week, and both close an hour earlier than they used to. One advantage to owning two restaurants is the ability to rotate staff from one location to another if one restaurant is short.

"We have several employees that are able to work at both places, mostly our top three people are very versatile for us," Bruce Rogers said. "They fill in everywhere for us."

Filling the gap

With pandemic-related federal unemployment programs ending, Bruce Rogers is expecting an increase in prospective employees. In addition, students returning to attend Eastern Oregon University in the fall are promising for filling positions.

To cope with employment challenges, the owners have adjusted the scope of employees compared to who they would typically hire in the past.

"The demographics have changed," Bruce Rogers said. "We've started hiring younger people, and we've started hiring older people. When we find people that are qualified, we try to snatch them up."

They hired, for example, two 16-year-olds in the summer and had a family friend who is a retired teacher come work for the restaurants.

"We've leaned on friends and family to help us through this time as well," Rogers said.

Committee Volunteers Needed

Grant County is now recruiting volunteers to serve on active boards and committees.

Obtain an Application to Volunteer from County Court, 201 S. Humbolt, No. 280, Canyon City OR 97820; (541-575-0059) GCCourtAdmin@grantcounty-or.gov Applications are due by Thursday, October 7, 2021

Committees are formal public bodies required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Extension & 4-H Service District Advisory Council

Eleven members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to provide guidance and assistance to local OSU Extension staff in planning, developing, and evaluating balanced educational programs directed to high priority needs of county residents. Membership is limited to one re-appointment.

Extension & 4H Service District Budget Committee.

Members include two advisory members and a member-at-large serving three year terms. Annual meetings include the County Court and are held to receive, deliberate, revise and approve the annual budget as provided by the District Budget Officer. Any proposed programs are discussed and considered.

Fair Board

ORS 565.210. Seven members serve three year terms and meet monthly to facilitate exclusive management of fair business operations, the fairgrounds, and other property devoted to the County Fair. Responsibilities include public relations and other work for the fair as needed.

Planning Commission

Nine members serve a four year term and two alternates serve a two year term, meeting as needed to review land use and zoning applications and discuss city and county growth issues and siting new facilities. Members must be residents of various geographic areas within the county and no more than two voting members shall be engaged in the same kind of business, occupation, trade or profession with agriculture designations of livestock / forage crop production and horticulture / specialty crop production. Commissioners serving in this capacity must file an Annual Verified Statement of Economic Interest with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Members must re-apply to the County Court before their term ends if they wish to be re-appointed. The commission is a formal public body required to comply with Oregon Public Meetings Law ORS 192.610.

Senior Citizens Advisory Council

ORS 410.210. Five members serve three year terms and meet semi-annually to define the needs of older adults, promote special interests and local community involvement, and represent senior citizens as an advocate to the local, state and federal government and other organizations.

Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee

OAR 603-019-0015. Members include one County Commissioner, two members who own or manage livestock and two members who support wolf conservation or coexistence with wolves. These members agree upon two business representatives to serve as additional members. The committee oversees the procedure established by Grant County for its Wolf Depredation Compensation Program. The current vacancy is for a business representative.

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Elk

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feed," said Robertson, a cattle producer and biologist.

Farm Bureau Board Member and local rancher

Pat Holliday noted in the press release that this year's drought — hottest and driest in over a century — has brought the problem on earlier and made it worse.

"Pastures that were already short of feed from

poor growing conditions won't have any fall feed for either cattle or wildlife," Holliday said.

Rick Henslee, a Farm Bureau board member and rancher from Long Creek and Fox, said in a "good year" the elk will devour between 30-40% of the fall forage on his property.

"This year," Henslee added, "we'll be darn lucky if, between the grasshoppers and elk, we'll have anything left."

He said this year is turning out to be among the worst years he has seen.

The press release notes that landowners, due to extreme drought conditions, should have every tool available to prevent injury to their properties, including the general elk damage tag.

Torland said that, in addition to these tags, the department has other tools for assisting private landowners dealing with elk damage, including controlled antlerless elk hunts, damage tags, emergency hunts and hazing permits.

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