

# Food cart rolls into Monument

By JUSTIN DAVIS  
Blue Mountain Eagle

**T**hirty-year-old Kegan Forrester made a bold move on Aug. 1, when he opened a mobile food cart in Monument, a town that boasts fewer than 150 residents.

So far, his gamble appears to be paying off.

His establishment, the Rim Rock Grill, boasts a restaurant-style menu with everything from bacon, eggs and toast for breakfast to ribeye steak for dinner. The building itself is a full camp trailer that has been cut open at the end, extended and reframed like a house.

Forrester said the reason for the construction method was to have more room and make the vehicle feel like a restaurant. "I didn't want a food cart, I wanted a restaurant," he said. "I wanted to do a restaurant menu. ... I didn't want like a hotdog or barbecue, I didn't want to zone in on just one thing."

Another unique feature of the Rim Rock Grill is the facade of the establishment itself. Forrester ditched the typical look of a food cart, instead going with a rustic

GRANT COUNTY NEIGHBORS


**NAME:** Kegan Forrester

**AGE:** 30

**RESIDENCE:** Monument

**OCCUPATION:** Owner/operator of The Rim Rock Grill in Monument

**ETC.:** The Rim Rock Grill, run from Forrester's home, is Monument's only restaurant



wooden look that makes the place feel more like a traditional restaurant and less like a cart on wheels.

Forrester was born in Monument and stayed there throughout most of his youth before moving away during his junior year of high school. He stayed away for a number of years before returning to Monument in 2020.

At first, Forrester was driving back and forth from Monument to John Day, where he worked as a welder. But high gasoline prices were a problem, and the lack of a restaurant in Monument was an opportunity. So Forrester decided to get out of the welding business and into the food business.

"I got tired of not having a resource in town, so I was like,

"I'm going to build something and maybe hire one of the high-schoolers to run it," and then it'll give the community something and I won't have to cook dinner every night," he said. "Kind of the best of both worlds."

Rising fuel prices left Forrester without much money at the end of the month following daily commutes to John Day, which kicked his restaurant plans into high gear.

"We buckled down and got it finished. We hired a high school student. It didn't work out right away because she's playing sports and stuff," Forrester said.

One of the things Forrester takes pride in is preparing all the ingredients for his dishes in-house.



Kegan Forrester sits in the service window of the Rim Rock Grill in Monument on Friday, Sept. 30, 2022.

"All my pulled pork, all my meat — that stuff is all done in-house," he said. "We smoke our own corned beef, we smoke the pulled pork, we smoke the chicken for our street tacos."

All of those things, from the facade to the preparation of the food, contribute to Forrester's main goal, which is to make you feel like you're at a

restaurant and not a food cart. His ultimate goal is for the Rim Rock Cafe to turn into a well-known foodie destination similar to the Dayville Cafe.

The reception from the community has been great so far, according to Forrester. "It's been awesome. We love it. I hope the community and people continue to support us

and whatnot, because they've been amazing," he said.

"I hope it doesn't slow down to the point that it's not sustainable, but as of right now they've been great."

The Rim Rock Grill is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. The restaurant can be contacted at 541-934-2551 and can be found on Facebook @TheRimrockGrill.

## State: Fire map didn't affect insurance

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

**SALEM** — State regulators say it's a coincidence some home insurance policies were revoked or became more expensive after the rollout of Oregon's ill-fated wildfire risk map.

Insurance decisions that adversely affected landowners were made independently, since none of the companies operating in the state report the map affecting their actions, according to state insurance regulators.

The allegations arose from the "great deal of misinformation about the state wildfire risk map and its connection to insurance," said Andrew Stolfi, insurance commissioner with the state's Department of Consumer and Business Services.

In early summer, a state-wide map identified 80,000 properties facing high or extreme fire risk in the wildland-urban interface, which meant they were subject to looming defensible space regulations.

An outcry from landowners convinced the state Department of Forestry to withdraw the wildfire risk map roughly a month later, vowing to come up with a revised version after reviewing data and communicating with the public.

Some critics said the map caused them to lose home insurance policies or pay hefty premiums, but a state government survey of insurance companies has failed to substantiate those complaints.

Not a single insurer reported raising rates or refusing to renew policies due to the map, according to a formal data call to which companies were required to respond by law.

"Insurers are in the risk identification business and have for years used their own tools, including their own risk maps, in their decision-making," Stolfi told lawmakers during a recent legislative hearing.

Any cost hikes or policy cancellations were based on private and unrelated conclusions about rising fire dangers, which simply occurred around the same time, he said.

"We're seeing our insurers respond to that risk," Stolfi said.

Though it's believable insurers truly weren't influenced by the map, that actually highlights the effort's shortcomings, said Dave Hunnicutt, president of the Oregon Property Owners Association, which advocates for landowners.

"If I were the state, I wouldn't be bragging about it," he said. "There's no reason for the insurance companies to

rely on the state map."

State regulators should take a page from insurance companies and develop a map that accurately assesses fire risks, Hunnicutt said.

The withdrawn map erroneously lumped properties together even if they were managed differently, he said.

"It was based on computer modeling and never ground-truthed," Hunnicutt said.

Homes that had been hardened against fire and surrounded by defensible space were classified at the same risk level as neighboring properties overgrown with flammable vegetation, he said.

Though landowners could appeal their classification, they could only argue the state had misapplied its own criteria to the area, he said. Efforts to make a specific property more resistant to fire weren't considered relevant.

"Even if you cut all the trees and paved the whole site, you'd never get out of the extreme classification," Hunnicutt said.

Insurance companies, on the other hand, "actually have skin in the game," so they analyze the risks more precisely, he said.

Hunnicutt sits on the state's wildfire programs advisory council and has recommended that regulators emulate the approach insurance companies take.

"If you're going to regulate how people use their property, that regulation should be based on accurate data," he said.

He also believes the council's proceedings should be better publicized and taken on the road, to engage with the views of community members.

"It seems like nobody knows who we are or what we do," Hunnicutt said. "There are a lot of these issues we could help the public understand."

Public meetings to discuss the wildfire risk map were scheduled during the summer, but threats of violence prompted state officials to cancel a meeting in Grants Pass in late July.

## Shearer's won't rebuild in Hermiston

MARCO GRAMACHO  
Hermiston Herald

**HERMISTON** — Shearer's Foods announced it will not rebuild its Hermiston plant after a fire in February destroyed the facility.

Shearer's estimated earlier this year that it would take 15 to 18 months to rebuild the plant.

"It was a difficult decision not to rebuild in Hermiston because of our dedicated employees and all the support we've received from the community over the years," Shearer's Foods Chairman and CEO Bill Nictakis said in a press release.

"As Shearer's continues to grow, we have decided that it is in the company's best interest to focus our resources on maximizing production at our other facilities."

Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said the move not to rebuild will have little effect on the city's economy. "The plant closing doesn't impact Hermiston from a property tax perspective because the plant was not located within the city limits," he said. "However, Shearer's was the only customer taking potable water from our regional water system."

Morgan said Hermiston was anticipating receiving \$210,000 in revenue from water sales to Shearer's, but with the fire in February, it cut the actual revenue for the year to \$115,000.

"We are now operating the system at a minimal level to maintain the asset without outside revenue coming in," he said.

The company, which produced potato and corn chips for national chains, reported on Friday, Sept. 23, it notified employees of the decision earlier last week.

Shearer's closed the Hermiston plant indefinitely after a boiler explosion and subsequent fire destroyed the facility. After the closure, Shearer's in March reported it gave the 230 employees of the plant a severance package, based on tenure and unused vacation, and has worked with community organizations to help them find employment in the meantime.

The Hermiston Community



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

A toppled section of the Shearer's plant stands Monday, April 4, 2022.

Center was the site of a job fair in mid March.

"We had an amazing turnout of 42 businesses offering positions to the displaced workers," Morgan remembered.

Shearer's Foods also is encouraging employees willing to relocate to apply at other locations.

Morgan said it obviously unfortunate and distressing for the individual workers the fire displaced, but "it is positive to see that they were displaced into a job market that is operating in a way that most of them have likely been able to find

reemployment by now."

By July, he said, the county-wide unemployment rate was at an all-time low of 3.8%, down from the 4.1% in February at the time of the fire. Prior to that, he said, the lowest unemployment rate on records dating back to 2005 in Umatilla County was 4.1% in November, 2019 just before the pandemic.

Hermiston is looking to meet with Shearer's officials to identify what their long-term plans are for the property itself, and how the city can assist

the company in getting the site ready to market for other potential users.

Morgan said the site still is a good one due to its proximity to state freeways, Interstate 82 and Interstate 84.

"It also has a dedicated rail-spur onsite, has large-scale water on-site and all of the necessary power and gas are on-site," he said. "So we're hopeful that we'll be able to work with the company to understand their long-range disposal plans for the property, and then work with our local agricultural production and processing community to find out what the potential market is for reuse of the site in a way that benefits all of our agricultural producers in the region."

According to the Shearer's Foods website, the Hermiston plant, which opened in 2010, was the company's only production facility in the Pacific Northwest. The Ohio-based company's other locations are in Ohio, Texas, Arkansas, Virginia, Iowa, Minnesota, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Ontario, Canada.

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