

Squeeze-in

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Painted Sky is in the process of acquiring a new location, which would free up the building referenced by Squeeze-In's window sign. Kim Randleas of Painted Sky says they did indeed reach out to offer their space once vacant, but they are still potentially a long a ways away from any move, as the purchase of the new building is still pending. "We don't really have a place to move right now," she said. "We're doing our best to help her out, but our timelines aren't really matching up."

Shawn Duncan bought the diner nine years ago, after she'd worked as manager of the Squeeze-In for 13 years.

Duncan says she asked to extend the lease at her current location on West Main Street but was told no by her landlady, Monika Fenton. There has been some frustration on Duncan's part, and from her regulars who don't want to see a change of venue, that a lease renewal or extension could not have been arranged.

Duncan can't understand why she can't stay, as she has



The window of the Squeeze-In as it appeared on Sunday, Oct. 23, 2022.

offered to pay more rent or sign a new lease. She said the first she knew that she was really going to have to move was when she received a letter from Fenton a month ahead of the deadline.

Fenton, however, said Duncan has known for a year that she would have to move out by the end of this month because that was written into the current lease.

Based on her conversations with Duncan at the time the last agreement was drawn up, Fenton said her understanding was that Duncan was planning to retire at the end of the lease, so she included an addendum to the lease — that both parties signed — specifying that the premises would be handed back "at closing of 10/31/22" and detailing what equipment

Tony Chiotti/Blue Mountain Eagle



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The chalkboard at the Squeeze-In Restaurant in John Day announces the pending move to a new location in Canyon City.

... You have to make sure that that building doesn't freeze, you know."

Duncan notes that she had a lot on her mind when she signed that final, one-year lease (which came on the heels of a string of five- and three-year leases), including how to deal with threats to her business from COVID, rising prices and hiring challenges.

"The fact is that I'm 67 and I didn't want to commit to five years," she says, but now she wonders if maybe she was a bit too candid in conversations with her landlady in which she verbalized the idea that it might be time to retire. She adds that "I shouldn't have ever said that."

It's easy to see how regular customers and friends of either party could take a strong opin-

ion, and emotional responses have appeared online surrounding the handover. But what is clear now is that when Duncan said she was thinking of retiring, Fenton began preparing as if that was the case. And on the 31st of the month, she'll have the keys back and can get to work on renovations.

The other certainty is that Duncan will have a busy month time ahead of her, navigating the logistics of the move-out and eventual move-in to the Squeeze-In's new home — whenever that can take place. It's also pretty certain that a lot of familiar faces will be more than happy to make the short trip to Canyon City to keep the pancakes, pies and handmade burgers on their plates, once all is said and done.

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Partnership

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There are concerns, however, mostly related to how power would be shared among the three member communities. Ketchum stated at the Oct. 11 council session that John

Day's city attorney is drafting an agreement that hashes out those concerns. John Day's attorney, Jeremy Green, also acts as the city attorney for Burns and Lakeview.

Talks about forming a partnership came about during discussions between Burns City Manager Nick Brown and

former John Day City Manager Nick Green about similar goals the two cities have. Those discussions evolved into ideas about sharing a city planner and sharing costs, which led to the idea of the R3 partnership. Both Burns and John Day then reached out to Lakeview to gauge its interest in joining the partnership.

There are no known partnerships like R3 in effect in the state. If approved, R3 would be a precedent-setting arrangement and an experiment that other cities would monitor to see if it works. Ontario, Vale and Nyssa have expressed interest in forming a similar partnership in the future, while the city of Hines has expressed interest in joining R3.

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