

# From the field to the freezer

Hermiston Foods has processed local vegetables for 25 years

BY SEAN HART  
HERMISTON HERALD

The asparagus harvest rolled through the lines at Hermiston Foods last week as the plant fired up for its 25th year of processing and freezing local vegetables.

General Manager Trent Waldern said the business employs 40 people full time and up to an additional 180 people during the harvesting season through Thanksgiving.

He said more than 200 people — employees, family members and dignitaries — attended an anniversary event Sunday in Hermiston, and about 75 employees were recognized for more than 10 years of service.

“We’ve had a real strong group that’s been here from the start,” Waldern said.

Three seasonal employees — Cindy McCallister, Tom Swope and Herminia Lopez — have worked for the company since it started 25 years ago, and Human Resource Manager Cyd Bothum said, in some families, all of the children work at the plant in high school and college.

“The one big thing I



Hermiston Foods employees and family members celebrated the company's 25th anniversary Sunday in Hermiston.

think Hermiston Foods can look back at is the great families that have gone through,” she said. “We’ve had a really big group of those families that have put their kids through here. They’ve been big assets for summer hires.”

Hermiston Foods employees process asparagus, peas, sugar snaps, lima beans and edamame from local farms and even harvest some of the crops themselves with the company’s seven combines.

Waldern said the process differs slightly among the various crops but generally involves several steps of cleaning before the vegetables are blanched, or treated with hot water.

“It does a bit of a pas-

teurization, kind of a kill step on vegetative cells, so any microorganisms,” he said. “The big thing it does is it deactivates the enzymes in the plant. If you don’t do that, it will start feeding on itself, and then the quality deteriorates. After that, it’s just cooling it and freezing it.”

Carrots require additional steps. Waldern said they are steam peeled and cut before they are blanched and frozen.

Waldern said it takes about 45 minutes on average to process the crops, which are usually frozen within four hours of being harvested. He said Hermiston Foods’ cold storage facility can store 3.5 to 4 million pounds of product, but the business pro-

cesses that much in about eight to 10 days. Once frozen, the vegetables are shipped out for further processing or packaging.

New technology has made processing vegetables more efficient in recent years, Waldern said.

“Lately, we’ve got some new electronic sorting inside the plant here, so that’s kind of a big thing in the last five years,” he said. “They’ve got sorters now that do infrared, where they shoot one wavelength of light, and if you’ve got chlorophyll, it’ll absorb some of that light, and then it re-emits light at a different frequency. The machine can measure that, and if the object doesn’t do that, it recognizes that it’s not



Hermiston Foods General Manager Trent Waldern, right, recognizes employee Cindy McCallister for 25 years of service at the company's 25th anniversary celebration Sunday.



From left, Hermiston Foods employees Roy Taylor, General Manager Trent Waldern, Refugio Garcia, Shane Page and Joe Shoemaker pose by one of the business's combines Monday. Hermiston Foods recently celebrated its 25th anniversary of processing and freezing vegetables from local farms.

a green vegetable, so it will kick it out of your flow stream.”

While automation and other technology have reduced the size of the Hermiston Foods workforce through the years, Waldern said the product volume has remained

steady. He said, in the future, maintaining a quality seasonal workforce while competing with year-long positions will be a challenge, but he is already looking for ways to keep the business rolling down the line for another 25 years.

## Banner Bank recognizes top employees

Banner Bank has announced the recipients of the company’s Banner’s Best awards for 2014. This year, 51 employees from across the Pacific Northwest were recognized for their exceptional performance in exceeding personal and bank-wide goals and delivering superior client service. The Banner’s Best Award is given to employees who have made an extraordinary difference throughout the year by delivering exceptional quality service and prod-

ucts to clients. The four recipients of the 2014 Banner’s Best Award from the eastern Oregon-area include:

- Customer Service Manager — Hermiston Branch, Casey Hinkley
- Teller — Hermiston Branch, Anabel Rodriguez
- Senior Vice President — Blue Mountain Division Manager Shawna Taylor
- Vice President — La Grande Branch Manager Jeff Puckett

## BUSINESS BITES

### Chamber hosting upcoming events

Join the Greater Hermiston Chamber of Commerce for the following events. These are businesses celebrating success in the Hermiston area:

- Grand opening and ribbon cutting, 11:30 a.m. Friday at Stetsons Steak House, 1619 N. First St., Hermiston.
- Grand opening and ribbon cutting, 5:30 p.m. May 13, C and R Mercantile

Co., 165 S.W. Third St. (next to Bi-Mart), showcasing the outdoor market, Hermiston.

- Alive After Five networking event, 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Sheer Illusions, 611 E. Highland, Hermiston.
- Ground-breaking ceremony, 3 p.m. May 14, Guardian Angel Homes new Memory Care Homes, 540 N.W. 12th St., Hermiston.

For more information about the events contact the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce at 541-567-6151.

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### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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McKay Creek Estates presents:

# SAFETY FIRST

Join us as we host a lecture series to increase safety awareness on fall prevention, common home injuries and provide solutions to keep you and your loved one safe!



SafetyMan says  
“Always be Safe to Ensure an Active & Independent Lifestyle”

### Healthy Back Habits for Caregivers

TUESDAY, MAY 26, 3:30PM

Many adults spend a considerable portion of their week caring for aging parents, relatives, friends, or other adults. According to the results of a recent study, the stresses and strains of providing care to an ill loved one may take a considerable toll on the mental and physical health of care-givers — including their back and spine health. Learn healthy back habits to keep you safe.

### Elder-Friendly Living: Modifying Your Home for Safety

TUESDAY, JUNE 23, 3:30 PM

No matter when the older person’s home was built and regardless of whether it is modern or traditional in style, it likely was designed for young adults and their families. As adults age their homes also grow older, but most are not updated to accommodate the resident’s changing needs. Home adaptation or modification can provide friendlier elder living so older occupants may continue to life safely in the comfort of their home.

### Know Your Numbers

TUESDAY, JULY 28, 3:30 PM

Are you at risk for diabetes, heart disease and other chronic diseases? Learn about the numbers and what they mean for various screenings to stay in control of your health. We will talk about cholesterol, blood pressure, body mass index (BMI) numbers and more.

For more information or to RSVP, call us at (541) 276-1987 or visit us today!

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## living with alzheimer’s



an education program by the  
alzheimer’s association

### Living with Alzheimer’s: For Caregivers – Middle Stage

Friday, May 8, 2015 | 12:30 - 5 p.m.

Pendleton Senior Center | 510 SW 10th St., Pendleton, OR 97801

In the middle stage of Alzheimer’s disease, those who were care partners now become hands-on caregivers. Join the Alzheimer’s Association Oregon Chapter for this class and hear caregivers and professionals discuss helpful strategies to provide safe, effective and comfortable care in the middle stage of Alzheimer’s.

This class is free, but registration is required. To register, call 800-272-3900.

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