

Second taxi service gets green light from city

TRANSPORTATION

BY JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

There's a new taxi in town.

Umatilla Cab Company is licensed to operate inside Hermiston and approved to accept riders from the Senior & Disabled Taxi Ticket Program effective today.

The city previously had an exclusive franchise with Hermiston Transit Services, but that deal expired Tuesday, June 30.

"We just inked a new contract with the cab company this morning," Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, said Tuesday.

In March, the city council voted unanimously to end the practice of granting an exclusive franchise to Hermiston Transit Services. The city created a taxi licensing system open to any company that meets the requirements. Morgan said there would probably be a few kinks to work out as the new system was implemented, but in the long run he believes healthy competition between taxi companies will be of benefit to residents.

Umatilla Cab Company has been in operation for

almost a year and owner Sundi Marquez said business has been steady. She expects it to increase now that the taxi company can legally transport riders within the Hermiston city limits and can accept the subsidized ride tickets.

"We're very, very pleased to have the honor to do the senior and disabled program," she said.

She said the company's two full-time and three part-time drivers have passed the necessary background checks to operate within Hermiston starting July 1. The company has a wheelchair-accessible van. It operates between 6 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. seven days a week and Marquez said she is willing to pick up riders outside of normal operating hours if they make arrangements ahead of time.

The company also does food deliveries and can pick up things like medications.

"We will even go grocery shopping for people," Marquez said.

As for the city-run Senior & Disabled Taxi Ticket Program, Morgan said the city plans to leave pricing and other aspects the same after



FILE PHOTO
Umatilla Cab Company uses Chevrolet HHR vehicles for its taxi service.

adding Umatilla Cab Company. Users must be Hermiston residents and register at City Hall. The cost of a one-way ticket will still be

\$2 each and can only be used within city limits.

Umatilla Cab Company can be reached at 541-567-6055.

Herald office access still restricted from construction

Access to the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian offices at 333 E. Main St. is still restricted due to ongoing sidewalk repair and construction.

Walk-in customers are still welcome, but the main entrance is not accessible due to the sidewalk work.

Power Pro, Inc., is taking out the old, uneven concrete steps and sidewalks and will be replacing the walkways leading to the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian main entrance.

Demolition work began on the project on June 19 and repair and reconstruction is ongoing. Work

to shore up awning supports became necessary as part of the project and the current heat wave has delayed the ability to pour new concrete, so the project is taking longer than originally anticipated.

The temporary public entrance to the building is located on the east side of the building and can be accessed via the alley off Southeast Third Street. The alley is located between Washington Federal and the Desert Cobbler.

For more information or assistance, call the Hermiston Herald/East Oregonian office at 541-567-6457.

Shari's hires new COO

Shari's Café & Pies, which started with a single restaurant in Hermiston, has hired a new chief operating officer.

Rob Geresi joins the company's executive leadership team amid changes occurring at Shari's.

"Shari's has been evolving at a rapid pace over the last couple years," said Bruce MacDiarmid, Shari's president and CEO. Nearly 60 percent of the restaurant locations have been renovated and "we've revamped our menu offerings with additional fresh, local and season item, and we've combined it all together with new branding elements," MacDiarmid said.

"Rob is a key piece of the puzzle. He brings a wealth of restaurant and entrepreneurial experience to our organization."

Geresi has held senior positions for Sonic Corp and Red Robin International

and he was co-founder of New York Bagel Enterprises.

In 1995, he received the National Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Shari's is the largest full-service chain based in the Pacific Northwest. Founded in Hermiston in 1978 and operated by Shari's Management Corporation of Beaverton, Oregon, Shari's Café & Pies restaurants are open 24 hours a day. Shari's has more than 4,000 employees at 96 locations throughout Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, Nebraska and Wyoming.

The first Shari's was founded in Hermiston, where the local restaurant is still located in Hermiston Plaza, by Ron and Sharon Bergquist. The Shari's name was derived from Sharon's nickname.

Latino Business Network meeting planned

The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce Latino Business Network meeting will take place at 9 a.m. Wednesday, July 8, at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. Identity theft and LegalShield law representatives Charlene Scott and Amber Skinner will be the guest speakers. Coffee and doughnuts will

be available.

The chamber's vision is to promote, educate and support Latino businesses in the greater Hermiston area through networking, advocacy and business community partnership. For more information about the Latino Business Network, call 541-567-6151.

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