

Umatilla County tourism jumps in 2017

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
STAFF WRITER

Oregon's tourism industry has seen persistent statewide growth this decade, and Umatilla County is no exception.

Travel Oregon released a new report Thursday about the tourism industry impact, including detailed estimates for each county.

According to the report, Umatilla County generated \$165.5 million in direct tourism spending in 2017, a 13 percent increase from 2016 and a 3.1 percent increase since 2010. That figure also accounts for 60 percent of the direct spending in the 11-county Eastern Oregon region. Other statistics showed jobs, earnings and tax revenue derived from tourism had all risen in recent years.

A Travel Pendleton coordinator for four years before he became Pendleton Convention Center manager, Pat Beard said he wasn't surprised that the figures showed growth in Umatilla County tourism.

Beard said Umatilla County has started to realize the economic potential of tourism in recent years.



The Hermiston Holiday Inn Express opened in 2017 as another option for tourists to Umatilla County.

HH FILE PHOTO

"We're just barely scratching the surface of what can be done," he said.

Many statistics were fairly flat from 2014-2016, before seeing a substantial jump in 2017. Beard theorized that a strengthening economy aided the tourism industry in 2017 in addition to low fuel prices that made road trips attractive.

Gail Nelson, Umatilla

County economic development and tourism coordinator, pointed to some more local factors that could have boosted tourism.

2017 was the first full year of operations for the new 93-room Holiday Inn in Hermiston, which provided more lodging revenue for events like the Umatilla County Fair and the Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

Nelson said tourism efforts in Athena, Milton-Freewater and the Umatilla Indian Reservation also provide options for tourists. But ultimately, Pendleton remains the top tourism attraction in the region.

According to the report, tourists in rural communities tend to stay in private homes rather than a hotel room, and Umatilla County is no dif-

STATE
Total Direct Spending: \$11.8 billion
Jobs: 112,200
Earnings: \$3.3 billion
Total Tax Revenue: \$1.2 billion

EASTERN OREGON*
Total Direct Spending: \$383 million
Jobs: 5,930
Earnings: \$123 million
Total Tax Revenue: \$17 million
Local Tax Revenue: \$5 million

UMATILLA COUNTY
Total Direct Spending: \$165.5 million
Jobs: 2,480
Earnings: \$52.4 million
Total Tax Revenue: \$6.3 million
Local Tax Revenue: \$1.7 million

Source: Travel Oregon
*Eastern Oregon includes Umatilla, Morrow, Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Sherman, Union, Wallowa and Wheeler counties.

ferent. When visiting, 39.9 percent of overnight tourists stay at a hotel, motel or short-term vacation rental while 45.3 percent use a private residence.

Travel Oregon provided a

wide array of statistics statewide and locally, but Nelson said one figure sticks out — the 2,480 jobs in the Umatilla County tourism industry in 2017, a 2.2 percent rise from the year before.

Spring Fling draws area vendors

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Everything from tacos to turtles were on sale at Stanfield's Spring Fling downtown on Saturday.

The market took over Coe Avenue for the day offering up food, crafts, art and vendors for items such as Tupperware and Scentsy.

Susan Kendrick of Ione was there selling jewelry and Western-themed purses. She said she sets up her booth at markets on the weekend to raise money for the Stormy Kendrick Memorial Scholarship, which she gives to a local student each year in honor of her son.

"Anything local I can do, I try to get out there," she said. "I'm glad to be here."

Around noon she said crowds had been pretty steady so far, and she enjoyed seeing people stop by and check out her wares. She originally started selling beadwork necklaces she made herself but has since expanded.

Charles Hlawek was set up on the edge of Coe Avenue selling freshly made kettle corn, which he churned



Kim La Plant, right, who works under the name Ozark Hippie, shows one of her paintings to a customer at the Stanfield Spring Fling on Saturday.

STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

out over an open flame. He said he came down for the market from the Tri-Cities because he knows organizer BeAnn Smith from her time working on the Hermiston Farmer's Market. Hlawek said he also plans to be at the Hermiston market this year, which has been rebranded as the Maxwell Market and moved to Thursday nights on South First Street.

He said he was excited

about the thought of some new life being breathed into that market. Saturday, however, he was focused on the Stanfield market.

Some vendors had their attention split over multiple markets Saturday, as the Open Air Market in Echo and Crafters in the Pasture in Hermiston were running at the same time. Jose Gutierrez of Potteryplus in Hermiston said his business

also had a stall at Crafters in the Pasture.

"We're doing double duty," he said.

The Potteryplus booth featured small, colorful turtle sculptures and larger peacock statues. Sitting on the corner across from the kettle corn, the peacocks drew in passerby to the market, which stretched down Coe Avenue past the city council chambers.

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