

JOBS

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He said the rapid changes in technology has also altered the way farms operate.

In less than 20 years, most machinery has become automated, which limits the number of jobs teens are needed to do.

"When I was growing up, you saw more younger people working simpler jobs on a farm, like picking berries," he said. "You don't see that anymore. For so many kids, their first job is at 16. And they've never been around a farm."

He said that lack of familiarity requires employers to spend more time training kids on how to operate and be safe around equipment.

"I've turned a lot of kids away this year," he said. "The jobs are out there, but it's a hard job."

Still, Ditchen said, he likes hiring high school and college kids to work for him. This year, he hired eight high school students and three college students.

Trevor Horn, 17, is a Hermiston High School student in his first year working for Ditchen.

As he drove a combine harvesting Kentucky bluegrass seed, Horn said he has been asked to do every type of task on the farm since he started working a few weeks ago.

"I probably enjoy helping in the mechanical shop most," he said. "Mostly because then I understand as much as I can."

Operating the combine is a close second, he said, but he's had to remind himself how big the machine is — even if it doesn't travel faster than 2 miles per hour.

Sammy Moore, 16, is in his second summer at Golden Valley Farms.

"It's farm labor — anything and everything," he

said, as he sorted through a box full of sprinkler heads that had been pulled out of the blueberry fields. "It's all on-the-job training. It's just common sense."

For many teens, securing a seasonal job is easier if they know someone in the industry.

"It's kind of a networking thing," said Jack Bellinger, owner of Bellinger Farms. He said he hires anywhere from five to 10 teens per summer, and many are friends of his high school-age sons, or people they already



Ditchen

know.

Most teens work on the sorting line, processing, weighing and dividing up melons. They will help pack them into boxes for small-market orders, and make lids and pallets.

"Some drive forklifts — not very many," Bellinger said, noting that kids have to be a certain age to operate machinery.

Rarely are teens out in the field, Bellinger said.

"It's definitely manual labor," he said.

Larger companies like Atkinson Staffing hire students every summer to work in the fields starting at age 15, mostly weeding around crops in Hermiston and Boardman.

Some agricultural jobs in the area are more research-based. The Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, operated through Oregon State University, hires a handful of high school students, as well as college and graduate students, to assist with lab work every summer.

"The principal investigator will hire students based upon need," said center director Phil Hamm. While high schoolers don't have to have a science background to get hired, it does help.

"It gives them the potential to learn about something they never knew about before, and potentially to do

as a career," he said.

Raegan Aldred, 17, and Benjamin Moore, 18, are both in their second year working at the experiment station, and are assisting with research in the entomology lab.

The two help collect data and read samples from the field.

Before starting work, the students have to go through safety training to learn how to be around farm equipment, and when it's safe to go in the fields after pesticide has been applied.

Both are interested in wildlife, and have been able to apply the skills they've learned in some way.

"For me, it's more been learning how scientists put data together," Moore said. "It's helped me out with some science classes."

Dallas Fridley, a regional economist for the state employment department, said in the third quarter of 2017, teens ages 14 to 18 held about three percent of the jobs in Umatilla County, or about 1,047 jobs. The number of agricultural jobs for youth increased in 2017, from about 40 to about 200.

"There has been more competition for these jobs from older workers," Fridley said in an email to the *Hermiston Herald*. "Certainly the situation was more difficult for youth following the recession — but with unemployment rates at historic lows, the job market for youth should be better now than it has been in recent years."

He said the top employer of youth in Umatilla County is the leisure and hospitality industry, providing about 370 jobs.

Many local employers said they will start their high school students at minimum wage, but are happy to give raises if they come back the next year, or show initiative in the job.

"The labor force out there is not plump," Bellinger said. "We're always looking for qualified people."

Stay safe with fireworks

HERMISTON HERALD

As the Fourth of July approaches, American Red Cross and the Umatilla County Fire District 1 are reminding people to be safe, and to use common sense when lighting fireworks.

Fire marshal Scott Goff asked people to make sure they light fireworks in areas clear of vegetation, stored items, and away from structures.

"Make sure you get a good plan to dispose of them," he said. "A bucket with water, give them a

good soak and make sure they're out before throwing them in the trash."

It's important to make sure kids are supervised when they light fireworks, he said, and Red Cross warns not to give any fireworks to young children.

The fire department often sees problems with people lighting fireworks too close to a house or out in the yard, Goff said, where parts of the landscape will catch fire.

Goff said the department usually has a few extra people on hand during the Fourth of July holiday, as

they usually see a few fires just after dark.

He said as far as he knows, all the fireworks sold in the area are licensed and permitted through the state fire marshal's office.

"The problem is typically stuff coming from out of state," he said. "Things that fly in the air, explode, those kinds of things tend to cause us problems."

The Red Cross suggests storing fireworks in a cool, dry place where children and animals can't get to them, and to keep your pets indoors the night of the Fourth of July.

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the public have approached the city council about issuing more licenses and creating an area where food trucks can gather. The city survey asks for opinions on increasing the number of licenses, creating a food cart pod and possible amendments to the ordinance.

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The **Hermiston Chamber of Commerce** is gearing up to put FUN in the festival. See next week's *Hermiston Herald* for information about **Hermiston Funfest**. The free family-friendly event is Saturday, July 14 in downtown Hermiston.

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The *East Oregonian* and *Hermiston Herald* have a new intern for the summer.

Brittany Norton, a native of Eugene, is a 2018 graduate from the **University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication**. She graduated with bachelor's degrees in journalism and media studies, and has an interest in feature writing. She has written for student-run

publications **Ethos Magazine** and **OR Magazine**, and has published freelance work in **Eugene Weekly** and **1859 Magazine**. She will be joining the newspapers through the **Charles Snowden for Excellence in Journalism** program, which is run through the University of Oregon.

You can check out her story on job vacancies on A5, and contact her with story ideas at 541-966-0809 or at bnorton@eastoregonian.com.

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Kayak Public Transit will be making stops in Echo starting July 1.

The free public bus system run by the **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation** will make multiple stops per day at City Park between Bridge and Dupont streets.

Echo residents can take the Hermiston Hopper into Stanfield, Hermiston, Umatilla, McNary or Irrigon in the morning and return in the afternoon. They can also take the bus into Pendleton, with connections to La Grande and Walla Walla.

Susan Johnson, man-

ager of Kayak, said people can find the full schedule at ctuir.org/tribal-services/planning/kayak-public-transit and encouraged riders to call dispatch at 541-429-7519 with questions.

"Our dispatchers are here to help people plan their trips," she said. "It can be confusing for riders to figure out the schedule, but they are very helpful."

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U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley — who recently confirmed he is "exploring" the possibility of a presidential bid — is holding a series of town halls in Eastern Oregon, including stops in Umatilla County.

On July 8, Merkley will stop at the **Pendleton Early Learning Center** (455 SW 13th St. in Pendleton) for a town hall at 1 p.m. That same day, he will move onto Boardman, where he'll hold a town hall at the **Port of Morrow** Riverfront Room (2 Marine Drive NE in Boardman) at 4 p.m.

You can submit items for our weekly *By The Way* column by emailing editor@hermistonherald.com.





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