

Fines under Oregon's self-serve law are rare

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The rules used to be simple: Don't pump your own gas in Oregon.

Then in 2016, fueling stations in low-population rural counties were allowed to offer self-service at night. The rules changed again in January, when counties with populations of less than 40,000 were allowed to go to 24-hour self-service.

In Umatilla County — population 76,985 — it is still illegal to pump your own gas any time of day. But the county is an island in a sea of counties where pumping your own gas is allowed, including the four counties it touches in Oregon and everything north of the Washington border.

Observation at local gas stations suggests some drivers and stations are taking a more lax attitude toward the law as a result.

Enforcement of the self-serve law falls not to law enforcement, but to the Oregon State Fire Marshal's office. The fire marshal can impose a \$500 civil penalty on gas stations found in violation of the law.

"The OSFM receives, responds to, and investigates any violations of the statutes and rules regulating the dispensing of class one flammable liquids," Richard Hoover, public information officer for the Oregon State Fire Marshal, wrote in an email. "These are generally complaint driven."

He said he did not know of any law enforcement agencies that cited for



Josh Brown serves a customer at Heller & Sons Distributing Inc. in Hermiston on Thursday.

STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

those violations, and he was unsure if they even had the authority to do so.

He said citations from the fire marshal's office are "not common."

"OSFM receives very few complaints of self-serve violations," Hoover said.

While gas stations can be fined for allowing people to pump their own gas, there is nothing in the Oregon State Statutes or recent bills that specifies a fine or other penalty for someone caught pumping their own gas.

Hoover confirmed that state statute only authorizes the OSFM to regulate stations and their owners, not customers.

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Richard Hoover,
public information officer for the Oregon State Fire Marshal

Mike Heller, owner of Heller & Sons Distributing Inc. in Hermiston, said when people (mostly out-of-towners) try to pump their own gas at Heller & Sons they are always asked to return to

their vehicle and let an attendant take care of it so that the station can comply with the law.

"We have people try and do that, but they can't, so we have to stop them," he said.

Heller said many customers — particularly the elderly — actually prefer to stay in their car while someone pumps their gas for them, especially when the weather is bad.

But others would prefer to handle it themselves.

Heller said motorcycle owners tend to be particular about making sure no gas is dripped on their bikes, for example, and some riders from out of state will complain when told they aren't

allowed to pump their own.

Heller said he believes the steps the legislature has taken to roll back the self-service requirement in some counties are a "stepping stone" toward eventually letting everyone in Oregon pump their own gas.

All joking aside (the rest of the country had a field day on social media earlier this year making fun of Oregonians who don't know how to pump their own gas), Heller said the 48 other states that allow self-service have shown that everyday drivers are, in fact, capable of refueling their own vehicles.

However, he also appreciates that it is easier on

some people to let an attendant pump it for them and he likes the opportunity to provide more jobs in the community.

Being a fuel station attendant is a good first job for teens, he said, because it teaches them how to interact with the public while on the job. He said he would keep attendants on hand even if the law changed to include Umatilla County.

"I'll offer full-serve until it's not economically feasible," he said.

The Legislature implemented Oregon's ban on self-service in 1951. Reasons listed within the bill include:

- Dispensing Class A flammable liquids without proper safety training can be dangerous.

- If customers leave their vehicles it puts them at risk of crime or injury such as slipping on wet pavement.

- Gas stations would have to pay higher liability insurance rates if customers are exposed to such dangers.

- Disabled and elderly customers will not be singled out in paying for the higher cost of full service.

- Exposure to toxic fumes from the gas is a health hazard, particularly to pregnant customers.

- Self-service in other states "does not provide a sustained reduction in fuel prices charged to customers."

- Self-service decreases employment opportunities for young people.

- Small children are put in danger when they are left in a vehicle while the driver goes inside to pay.

Umatilla history buffs record memories of town

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Long after memories fade, there will be a record of Umatilla's formative years — thanks to efforts of a group of history buffs.

The Umatilla Museum is in the process of interviewing longtime residents of the town, focusing on people who grew up there during the 1940s and 1950s. They are filming interviews and plan to compile them onto a disc that people can reference to learn about the town's history.

The city was established in 1864, but museum members are trying to collect memories of those who were growing up around the time the McNary Dam was built and the town began to take the shape it is today.

Sam Nobles, president of the museum and a longtime resident, graduated from Umatilla High School in 1954.

"There's a lot of history in Umatilla," he said, recalling the town's origins as a trade center and the importance of the railroad. Many of the residents being interviewed worked on McNary Dam as it was being constructed from 1947 to 1954, or remember a flood that devastated the town in 1948.

Previously, most of the town was built closer to the river, which is now referred to as "old town." It was moved to higher ground in 1968 due to projected flooding from the building of the John Day Dam.

Museum members hope to collect the memories of older residents, but don't have a specific set of questions.

"We get them started, and then just let them talk," said Leslie Smith, vice president of the Umatilla Museum. "It's not really an interview so much as recalling and documenting those memories."

The project has become something of a bridge between older and younger



Rita Creamer, left, talks to Nikolas Schuening about her memories of growing up in Umatilla. Creamer was one of several people being interviewed for a project by the Umatilla Museum.

STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

generations. Nikolas Schuening, who graduated from Umatilla High School a few years ago, is filming and editing the interviews for the museum. He volunteered to film interviews after coming to the museum to help a few friends film a school project, and museum staff asked him if he'd help with their project.

Schuening said he has enjoyed listening to the stories of people he films.

"I've wanted to do something for Umatilla — the town I was raised in," he said. "I'm glad I can give back to the community that's given so much to me, in the way I'm able to."

He added that even though he's a native son, there's much about the town that he'd never heard.

"You don't always know about your own history," he said.

So far, museum members have interviewed about 10 people.

Rita Creamer, a lifelong Umatilla resident, sat in front of a camera in the museum's back room last week, and reminisced about her youth. In high school, she worked at the local theater.

"It was run by all kids," she said. "There were no grown-ups."

Some subjects came from out of town. Alan Hiatt, 88, hasn't lived in Umatilla since 1951, but still fondly remembers growing up there. His sons, Terrence and Don, drove him out from Vancouver, Washington, so he could record his memories.

"My dad's been wanting to come back," Terrence said.

Alan Hiatt remembered the barbershop his father owned, and the hotel his mother ran, both in old town Umatilla.

"I was the fire chief for many years," he said.

He also worked on the dam, building concrete forms. Two of his brothers ran the ferry across the river and one worked as a toll collector when a bridge was built.

The project will be ongoing, Smith said, while they collect more memories from people.

Nobles said he also hopes younger people, such as high school students, will take an interest in the museum. He said he'd like to feature aspects of the current high school, such as the robotics team, in one room.

"We want to note the way the school has progressed, the way the culture has changed," he said.

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