



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Jose Quinones, who co-owns the Econo Lodge in Umatilla, stands in a room renovated after a fire damaged the motel (then called Tillicum Inn) in September 2017.

Former Tillicum Inn reopens

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

The former Tillicum Inn has risen from the ashes.

The Umatilla hotel has been franchised as an Econo Lodge and reopened Friday after closing for more than a year to repair damage from a fire.

Jose Quinones, who has owned the 40-room hotel with his wife, Parveen, for three years, said they couldn't wait to finally open their doors again.

"It took a long time, but we're here," Quinones said.

The inn was lucky in a lot of ways, but even with the stars aligning, the fire meant more than a year of lost revenue and employees who took jobs elsewhere during the closure.

Hotel manager Josie Kepich, who stuck with the business through the past year, said the fire started around noon on Sept. 6, 2017. Luckily, she said, because it started in the middle of the day, there were only about seven people in the building and she was able to quickly get them out before anyone was injured.

The blaze heavily burned six rooms in the center of the building — three upstairs and three downstairs — but other rooms were also damaged by smoke, water and firefighters chopping holes in the roof to help them put the flames out more quickly. It got so hot in the upstairs hallway that the plastic case around the fire extinguisher melted.

"It was ugly," Kepich said. "After everyone left, I came in here and thought, 'Oh my gosh.'"

When asked how the fire started, Kepich and Quinones said it was an electrical cause, but they didn't know the exact problem or what room the

fire started in. They said they preferred to leave that to the insurance company and fire department to discuss directly.

"That's in the past; we're looking forward," Kepich said.

After the fire, they started working through the insurance claims process and getting all the needed permits to strip most of the building down to the studs and completely remodel. Smoke-damaged linens, carpet, drapes, beds and other items were tossed out and contractors from Belfor Restorations were brought in. Luckily, Quinones said, Farmers Insurance was great to work with, and everyone from city staff to the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce told the business to just let them know whatever they needed.

"It's been hard, but we have had everyone helping us," Kepich added.

While some employees have moved on to other jobs since the fire, Kepich said many are returning to work for what will now be known as the Econo Lodge. Customers, too, have been using other hotels, but Kepich said judging by the number of calls she still gets asking when they will be open again, at least some are planning to return next time they're in town.

"We need to get opened up and start some revenues going again," she said.

The newly remodeled Econo Lodge features new "everything," from furniture to carpet to showers. Private kitchenettes have been added to some rooms, and the business has added a continental breakfast.

Quinones said after all the community has done for them, he and his wife and the staff are anxious to find ways to give back to the community.

Hermiston High School hosts Knowledge Bowl

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Winning the Knowledge Bowl takes several of the seven cardinal virtues — patience, diligence, even humility — but knowing what the whole group of them are called was worth a point all by itself.

One of the questions in the final round asked students: Since the early days of the Christian church, the seven deadly sins have been balanced by the seven cardinal what?

The battle of wits at Hermiston High School put students from local high schools through four rounds of questioning, on subjects from pre-calculus and chemistry to religion and world history.

A final round ended with a team from Echo on top, followed by two Hermiston



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

Students competed in Hermiston's Knowledge Bowl, while school board member Dave Smith (center) kept time, and Nancy Lauck read questions.

teams.

Several local schools host competitions throughout the year. This year, teams from Echo, Hermiston, Stanfield and Umatilla competed, along with a team from Con-

nell, Washington.

The Hermiston club is run by HHS counselor Maggie Hughes-Boyd, and former HHS teacher and current BMCC professor John Lauck.

Within their schools, students meet throughout the year to practice and compete, testing their knowledge in history, literature, math and science.

In competition, there are three 4-person teams in a room, and the teams have a few seconds to talk it over and respond. If the first team to answer gets it wrong, the other teams have a chance to respond.

John Cox, a social studies and English teacher in Echo, had 12 high school students at this year's competition.

During the school year, he said, the team gets together twice a week during lunchtime, and reviews questions from previous years.

Though some students find a niche where they carry the team, Cox said he hopes most students will develop a good sense of general knowledge.



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