

COLUMN

The Hermiston Herald will be free starting in May

In a column last week I teased that exciting new changes are coming for the *Hermiston Herald*, and this week I'm ready to announce it:

Starting the first full week of May, the *Hermiston Herald* will transform from a small-circulation paid newspaper to a mass distribution free product mailed to a majority of households (nearly 11,000) in western Umatilla and eastern Morrow counties, and distributed for free at rack locations throughout the area each week.

The new *Herald* will feature unique local reporting — different from the arti-

cles published in our sister paper the *East Oregonian* — plus the same display and insert advertising that you have come to expect.

Content will include many popular features we have already been offering, ranging from the Hermiston History column to obituaries. A few items, such as local sports coverage, puzzles and the Screen Time section, will migrate to

being reserved for paid subscribers of the *East Oregonian*. But we will also be adding new features, such as a weekly full-page opinion page, and will have an increased focus on coverage

of economic development news about business, housing and agriculture.

Our website, social media pages and mobile app will remain active, with the paywall removed (a development that should bring joy to the many people who have expressed their displeasure about said paywall over the years).

In addition, all *Hermiston Herald* paid subscribers will automatically be converted to *East Oregonian* customers. There you will continue to find even more breaking news, sports, and features, served up three times a week in print (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays) and 24/7 across the website, e-edition, email

newsletters, social media and more.

If you would like to create an account to access the digital news services included in your new *East Oregonian* subscription, please call our customer service center at 800-781-3214. Subscribers can also activate their digital subscription via the website at eastoregonian.com, or via e-mail us at circulation@comediagroup.com.

This transition likely brings up a lot of questions, and we will be attempting to answer all of them over the next month. Feel free to contact me directly at jmc-dowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536 with questions or feedback.

One question I know will likely be on many people's minds — particularly those who have seen me argue on social media and in these pages about the importance of paying for news — is how we will continue to fund the reporting, editing and production of the *Hermiston Herald* without paying subscribers.

While those operations will continue to cost us money, tearing down the barriers of cost and internet access to make Hermiston news more accessible than ever before is a gift to the community, but it is also a gift to advertisers, such as candidates for office, local businesses and nonprofits looking for

a way to get their message in front of everyone in the greater Hermiston area. We hope they'll see it that way, and will support this new, much-expanded access to news in the greater Hermiston area and northeastern Morrow County through advertising. Knowing Hermiston's famed generosity, we have also added a button to our website where people can support local journalism through a direct financial contribution.

Thank you for being a newspaper reader and an informed citizen. We look forward to serving as your local news source for many years to come in both the new *Hermiston Herald* and the *East Oregonian*.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston offers help for small businesses seeking stimulus aid

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Before the federal government opened up \$349 billion in funding for small businesses on Friday, the city of Hermiston, Hermiston Chamber of Commerce and Hermiston Downtown District were encouraging business owners to talk to their banks about it.

Businesses that have a utility account with the city or are members of the chamber or downtown district received calls Thursday and Friday to discuss how they can access the Paycheck Protection Program included in the recent \$2 trillion stimulus package known as the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The Paycheck Protection Program allows small businesses and nonprofits — those with fewer than 500 employees — to borrow up to 2.5 times their monthly payroll in order to pay employees, rent and other fixed operational costs through June 30.

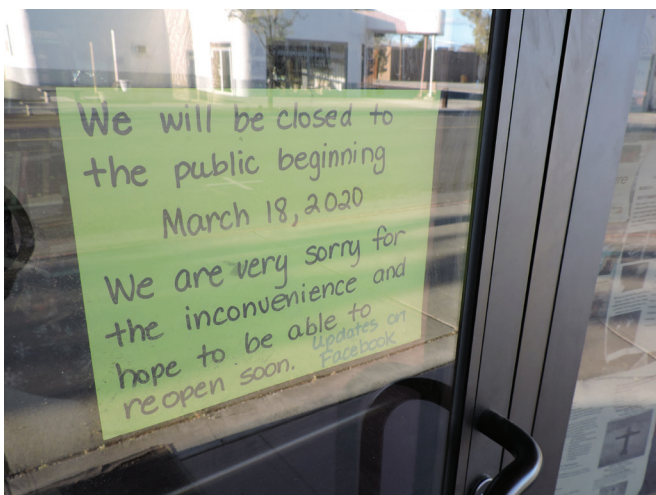
Businesses in the hospitality industry, including restaurant chains, can consider each separate location its own "business."

According to the Small Business Administration, "The loan will be fully forgiven if the funds are used for payroll costs, interest on mortgages, rent, and utilities" if at least 75% of the forgiven was used on payroll.

The amount of the loan that is forgiven will be reduced if, during the two-month period of the loan, full-time employee headcounts decline or wages decrease.

The loan has a maturity of two years and an interest rate of 0.5% with payments deferred for the first six months.

The SBA is waiving its normal requirements for collateral and will not charge any fees.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

A sign in the window of Neighborhood Books and Gifts in downtown Hermiston announces it is closed during the pandemic.

"WE WANT TO DIRECTLY CONTACT ALL OF OUR LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO TALK TO THEIR BANKING PARTNERS."

Mark Morgan, assistant city manager

"This is a huge Federal spending bill which sounds too good to be true, and is therefore sure to generate a large degree of disbelief from businesses, and unfortunately give rise to a large sub-industry of scammers," Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, said in a statement.

"That's why we want to directly contact all of our local businesses and encourage them to talk to their banking partners." According to a news release, city staff whose normal job duties have been affected by COVID-19 closures, such as parks and recreation staff and librarians, helped the chamber make the calls.

They encouraged business owners to contact their bank immediately to discuss applying for the program, which began taking applications on Friday. The release states that while many financial institutions are working to become eligible to assist in the PPP, as of last week the only certified banks with phys-

ical branches located in Hermiston are Banner Bank, Columbia State Bank, Umpqua Bank and U.S. Bank. Businesses that bank with other institutions should check with them on their eligibility.

They will not ask businesses for bank account numbers or other sensitive information, and business owners should be aware of scammers posing as the Small Business Administration who may ask for such information over the phone. Instead, businesses should deal directly with their lender in applying for the loan.

Morgan said a "huge thanks" is owed to the offices of Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, as well as Representative Greg Walden for helping local businesses have access to the opportunity.

On a statewide level, businesses are encouraged to visit oregon4biz.gov to see what aid may be available to help with COVID-19 impacts.

Umatilla County to give emergency relief grants to small businesses

By ALEX CASTLE
STAFF WRITER

Small businesses in Umatilla County now have another resource for some economic relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners redirected the \$68,000 remaining in its economic development grant fund on April 1 into an emergency relief grant fund for small businesses suffering during the outbreak.

"We're trying to get it spread out to as many people as we can to help, but also help them take advantage of other current funding that's starting to become available," said Gail Nelson, economic development coordinator with the county.

Applications open on April 7 and are due by April 21. They can be found at www.umatilla-county.net/grants. Appli-

cants must be a business in Umatilla County with 25 or fewer employees that can show a direct impact from COVID-19 and can show they have applied for at least one other source of relief funding.

The Umatilla County Economic Development Grants Committee coordinates the quarterly grant program, which is funded by the Oregon Lottery and distributed to small businesses to stimulate economic development, promote tourism and support community development in the county.

Now, the committee will help coordinate the distribution of \$1,000 grants to small businesses that are struggling due to the pandemic, using a lottery system.

The idea is for businesses to utilize these grants in addition to incoming help from the \$2 trillion

stimulus package coming from the federal government later in April.

"I still would hope that we give careful attention to what kind of businesses, sole proprietor or otherwise, that might have been overlooked in the help packages," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said.

Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer emphasized businesses from each community in the county will be eligible.

"The biggest thing I wanted to make sure was everyone in the county had access to it," he said.

Nelson said the number of relief grants distributed to each community in the county will be tied to the percentage of the population that community represents, which is the same as the usual economic development grant program.

There's no place like home  to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Social distancing is the most effective tool we have for slowing the spread of the coronavirus. And that means staying home, if you can.

Work from home. Play at home. Stay at home. If you must go out, keep your social distance—six feet, or two arm-lengths apart. Young. Elderly. In between. It's going to take every one of us. If home really is where the heart is, listen to yours and do the life-saving thing.

Visit Coronavirus.gov for the latest tips and information from the CDC.

#AloneTogether

PET OF THE WEEK

Millie is very timid and needs to have a few meets with any potential adopter. She is approx 1 1/2 years old, spayed, microchipped & vaccinated. She is house and leash trained, hates a crate, afraid of cats, does need another dog to play with in the household. Has separation anxiety, so someone needs to be home most of the day with her.



MEET MILLIE

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, animal shelters need our help more than ever. Please donate to your local shelter, or offer to foster an animal in need.

If interested please go to fuzzballrescue.com and fill out an application.

If you are not able to adopt, but would like to foster or donate, visit fuzzballrescue.com or you can mail in donations to Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, PO Box 580, Hermiston, OR 97838

TOGETHER, WE CAN HELP SLOW THE SPREAD.

