

UPDATE

Helps is available for those who have lost their jobs or are otherwise struggling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are some resources for Umatilla County residents:

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Oregonians can apply for food, cash, child care assistance and other benefits from their own home using the online application at govstatus.egov.com/or-dhs-benefits. According to DHS, heavy traffic to the website between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. sometimes causes technical issues, so people are encouraged to log in outside of those times. If people have trouble navigating the online application or don't have reliable internet access, they can call their local DHS office to apply by phone or other methods. They can find the information for the nearest office, or resources such as food banks, by calling 211 from any phone, texting their zipcode to 898211 or emailing help@211info.org.

AGAPE HOUSE

Eastern Oregon Mission runs Agape House and Martha's House in Hermiston. Martha's House provides transitional shelter for families temporarily experiencing homelessness, while Agape House offers services that include emergency food boxes and showers. To contact Agape House, call 541-567-8774 or visit agapehousehermiston.org.

CAPECO

Community Action Program of East Central Oregon provides assistance to those in need in several Eastern Oregon counties, including Umatilla and Morrow counties. Programs include assistance with food, utility bills, transportation, housing, wellness, respite care, senior independence and more. To contact CAPECO call 541-276-1926 or visit capeco-works.org.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Deigo Arriola, left, picks up an order from La Palma in Hermiston on Friday before taking it to a customer of 541 To Go.

Perfect timing

New Hermiston business helps people stay home during the pandemic

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Starting a new business takes hard work and skill, but a little bit of luck doesn't hurt too.

For 541 To Go, it turns out March 2020 was the perfect time to launch a business that involves helping people stay home.

"Obviously, we opened up in kind of an interesting time," owner Arley Atkins said.

541 To Go allows people to order food from Hermiston-area restaurants online and have it delivered to their door. The business includes about 20 different offerings, from fast food chains like Taco Bell to sit-down diners like The Pheasant. It also includes grocery pickup from Walmart.

Food delivery services had already caught on in other cities before the pandemic, but many people still preferred sitting down with their family, friends or co-workers for a restaurant meal. Now

that Oregon restaurants are all take-out-only, however, delivery might seem like a more attractive option.

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— Arley Atkins, Owner of 541 To Go

it more because it's one of their only options, or if it's something people would use anyway," Atkins said.

He said there are downsides to opening a new business in a pandemic, too.

The layoffs and overall economic downturn caused by COVID-19 has caused a lot of people to tighten their budgets, including fewer splurges on food items.

Atkins had hoped to have more restaurants on the 541 To Go website when it launched in March, but some of those restaurants have closed completely for the duration of the shutdown. And some would-be customers don't feel comfortable eating food handled by anyone else right now, even though the World Health Organization has stated that the virus doesn't appear to be passed through food.

Other people are grateful for the service, however, that allows for contactless delivery as they prepay online, and then drivers use a company credit card to pay for the food at the restaurant.

"People have been awesome, and the drivers have been giving me good feedback from customers," Atkins said.

One of those drivers, Diego Arriola,

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Hermiston Herald switches to free distribution

By **ANDREW CUTLER**
HERMISTON HERALD

Almost 12 years to the day the EO Media Group took ownership of the *Hermiston Herald*, the venerable paper is now undergoing another significant milestone.

Starting this week, the *Herald* will transform from a small-circulation paid newspaper of approximately 1,000 to a mass distribution free product mailed to more than 14,500 households in western Umatilla and eastern Morrow counties, and distributed for free at rack locations throughout the area each week.

"We are going to put it in the hands of as many people as possible in the greater Hermiston, Umatilla and Boardman areas," said Chris Rush, the regional publisher of the *Herald*. "We're going to overnight, basically, take it from a 1,000-plus paid circulation to 14,000-plus free distribu-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

The final subscription-based *Hermiston Herald* runs on the press at the *East Oregonian* print facility in Pendleton on April 28. Starting this week, the paper will be a free product mailed to households around western Umatilla County and northern Morrow County.

tion. That's a huge audience and it deserves to be seen."

Rush said taking the *Herald*,

which published its first paper under EO Media Group control on May 2, 2008, to a free publication

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— Chris Rush, regional publisher of the *Herald*

has been a topic that's been around in some form for at least a year.

"It was an issue we needed to look at and figure out going forward," he said. "We looked at some alternatives and I think we gave it a good effort to try to promote it with standard marketing and do those things that typically you do from a circulation marketing standpoint."

But Rush said it's important to remember that a newspaper lives and dies financially by the amount of revenue it generates through advertising. The move to a free publication should make the product more attractive to local,

regional and national advertisers.

"I think a lot of folks probably assume that we make our money by selling individual newspapers and that's never been true. Circulation, subscriptions, what we charge in a rack — that basically subsidizes delivery of the product," he said. "Any revenue that we would lose by forgoing paid circulation, we are betting is going to be more than made up for on the revenue side by having a vastly larger reading audience, and that it also doubles as a very excellent advertising vehicle for local businesses."

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