

SOME LOCAL BUSINESSES CAN SAY:

'WE'RE HIRING'

Service, hospitality industries bounce back slightly under Phase 2

By NADA SEWIDAN
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston and other Eastern Oregon restaurants, bars and hotels said they are happy to be back, with many reopening their dining room floors, hiring additional staff members and rehiring old ones too.

Service staff — cooks, dishwashers, servers and bartenders — were among the hardest-hit when the pandemic closed down restaurants across the state, but now “We’re Hiring” signs are popping up on restaurant windows around Hermiston.

“We’re thrilled to have been able to reopen our Bistro ... and our guests have been excited about that, too,” Oxford Hotel and Suites senior marketing manager Lorealle Bishop said.

With counties moving into Phase 2 of reopening, the Oregon Employment Department anticipates more jobs gained, in both Oregon and Umatilla County, after COVID-19 layoffs sent the economy reeling.

Projections Economist Felicia Bechtoldt said the Oregon Employment Department anticipates Umatilla County will continue to gain jobs in industries that were hardest hit, such as restaurants and other businesses in the hospitality industry.

“We anticipate the unemployment to decline a bit and we anticipate some jobs that were lost to be added back, in particular leisure and hospitality,” Bechtoldt said. “That’s the quickest and largest impact to gaining some of the jobs back.”

Currently, The Pheasant is looking to hire a part-time bartender. General Manager Deanne Jensen said their restaurant has been busy since reopening, which contributes to an increase in hiring to fill the demand.

“Business wise, we are busy, busy, busy,” Jensen said. “We’re trying to get back to as normal as we can or the new norm. We appreciate everyone’s business and their support.”

Jensen also added that she’s talked to customers coming up from Tri Cities, which has helped contribute to business and the flow in the service industry economy.

Although restaurants are reopening, not all of their pre-pandemic staff are coming back. Some restaurant owners said they could not rehire previous staff members for several reasons, mainly because some are either pursuing other avenues, or because the unemployment compensation seems more certain and safe than working in a restaurant mid-pandemic.

When it comes to employment chal-



Growlers sit on the bar top at Nookie's Restaurant and Brewery in Hermiston in May. The restaurant is one of several that has had to hire new staff after reopening.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan



A hiring sign taped to the front of Nookie's restaurant in Hermiston in May is one of many seen around town since restaurants reopened.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

lenges, a few restaurants, including Shari's in Hermiston and Prodigal Son Brewery & Pub in Pendleton, noted transitions of employment and safety.

Co-owner of Prodigal Son Brewery & Pub Tim Guenther said some are afraid of serving the public and noted that service staff are especially vulnerable because they interact with a lot of customers throughout their shift.

Shari's manager Becky Jones said the newly reopened jobs are “definitely different” than before the pandemic.

“The masks, we’re definitely not used to that,” she said. “The gloves, we’ve had challenges, but we’re on board with it.”

Other hospitality businesses said they have not only rehired their old workforce, but have added additional jobs on the payroll. In Oxford Hotel and Suites’

“BUSINESS WISE, WE ARE BUSY, BUSY, BUSY. WE’RE TRYING TO GET BACK TO AS NORMAL AS WE CAN OR THE NEW NORM. WE APPRECIATE EVERYONE’S BUSINESS AND THEIR SUPPORT.”

Deanne Jensen, general manager of The Pheasant, is looking to hire a part time bartender

Hermiston location, the hotel is currently hiring cooks, housekeepers, maintenance staff and front desk agents.

In May, Oregon was able to regain 22,500 nonfarm payroll jobs, and one out of 10 jobs were recently added back that were cut in April, according to reporting by the state. The unemployment rate state-

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City council green-lights property purchase

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston City Council unanimously voted during their Monday, June 22 meeting to authorize Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith to finalize purchase of two lots on the east side of city hall.

The narrow lots contain a strip of parking spaces and the offices known as the Lanham Building. Smith told the council that the negotiated price for the property was \$400,000, but “if the appraisal comes in differently we can renegotiate the price based on the appraisal.”

If the purchase is completed, it would connect city hall to a city-owned parking lot further down the block, creating a large block of property stretching from the



The Hermiston City Council voted unanimously to purchase two lots, one of which includes the Lanham Building, adjacent to the city hall during their meeting on Monday, June 22, 2020.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

festive street to Affordable Family Eyewear. The city is working on designs for a new, larger city hall where the current one stands, and would use the Lanham property to accommodate that design and the necessary parking.

“It really does help us,

even adjusting that existing lot, to add more space to make it more efficient,” Smith said.

Monday’s council meeting was at its fourth location since the beginning of the year, this time in the large banquet hall at the Hermiston Community Center.

Chairs were spread out six feet apart, the microphone was sanitized between users, and three city councilors — Roy Barron, Manuel Gutierrez and David McCarthy — were wearing masks.

During the meeting, the council made changes to the city’s food truck ordinance

and discussed the future of its food truck pod.

Currently, mobile food vendors in Hermiston city limits can either join the pod on the corner of Third Street and Orchard Avenue, or can apply for one of six mobile food vendor licenses if any of those six licenses is avail-

able for use. The council added two new temporary license options.

The first is an event license, that would allow a food truck to set up for a one-time event such as a customer appreciation day at a business. The other is a “lunch truck” license that would allow a food truck to park at a construction site or industrial work site between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

In a work session prior to the council’s regular meeting, City Planner Clint Spencer presented options for continuation of the city’s food truck pod, which is in its second summer of operation. After its pilot program in 2019, the council had directed staff to come up with recommendations for a

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