

EDITOR'S DESK

Don't ask for more of what you're not using

In all the time I've worked as a journalist covering Hermiston, I think 2020 is the first year I haven't had a single person call to tell me they had heard from a very credible source that Costco or Winco was coming to town.

Every time I've reached out to those stores, they've let me know the rumor was wishful thinking on residents' part.

I understand the impulse. When I moved here in 2013, it definitely felt like Hermiston's retail and restaurant offerings had not kept up with its rapid population growth. A study commissioned by the chamber of commerce at the time confirmed that Hermiston was "underserved" by those industries.

The good news is the greater Hermiston area's food scene has greatly diversified since. We've added sushi restaurants, a salad shop, a bistro, a Vietnamese restaurant, Mexican-Japanese fusion, a BBQ food truck and other options that used to require a trip to the Tri-Cities in Washington. I suspect people who say there are no good resta-



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR



Staff photo by Jade McDowell, File
Panda Express, which opened in December 2019, is one of Hermiston's newer restaurants. The building replaced an Indian restaurant that went out of business.

rants here may not have tried all the area has to offer.

I definitely wouldn't say no to more options, however. And retail options have grown less quickly than restaurants, with the notable exception of a new Ranch & Home.

So what can we do about it?

I often hear people say, "The city needs to bring in ..." but city governments have limited control over what businesses set up shop in town. They can set rules about what types of uses are allowed in certain zones. They can offer financial incentives, such as tax breaks or grants. They can try to make property in town more attractive. But at the end of the day, the determining factor is whether a business looks at a town

and says, "We could make some good money here."

Large chains people often wish for have that determination down to a science. Sites for new stores must meet criteria that include not only a certain number of people living within a 15-minute drive but also factors, such as the median income and number of cars passing by the lot per day. They also look at similar stores or restaurants in the area and the "leakage" of residents who are spending their money in other towns.

Residents don't have much control over their town's population, other than completing the census so that number is not artificially low. But the number one thing all of us can do to encourage new retail and restaurants in our community is to shop local.

Believe me, corporations know if you don't shop local. Those free apps you have downloaded on your phone that let you play games or check the weather forecast? They're often free because the real money is in tracking your every move and selling that information. Retail analytics firms also use your online activity and debit card use to provide "customer behavior" data to companies considering where to expand.

If you want more restaurants and shopping options in Hermiston (or Umatilla or whatever town you live in), eat here more often. Shop here. Why would Olive Garden go through the expense of building in Hermiston when they're already getting your money at their Tri-Cities location? Why would Winco build here when there's a chance everyone will just keep driving up to Costco for their groceries instead? Why would a Hermiston resident take the risk to open up a new business in town when they've seen so many other businesses die from lack of support?

I know it's hard — options can be limited here for certain items, and as good as our local restaurants are sometimes I can't resist those Texas Roadhouse rolls.

But as a member of a struggling local business I also understand the other side — wishful thinking is not enough to sustain a business. When I started covering Hermiston we had six reporters and a full-time editor in Hermiston. Now you get just me, because Facebook likes do not pay the bills.

The best way to increase the number and quality of local businesses is to support the ones we already have.

COLUMN

Making the most of a learning experience

Each new school year is a learning experience. Teachers and students join together to create a positive environment out of a new mix of personalities, skill sets and abilities. Educators introduce new technologies and techniques to make sure they're providing a high-quality and relevant instruction.

Meanwhile, new friendships, milestones, goals and experiences blend together to create an atmosphere of growth and development. It's an exciting and important time.

We are now two weeks into the 2020-21 school year and have been writing and executing a whole new playbook across the district to contend with state guidelines regarding COVID-19. Many of the bonding experiences teachers have used to bring a class together have been difficult to replicate, but they have worked hard to deliver the core instruction to every student.

It is far from an ideal way to educate, and



Tricia Mooney

I'm grateful for the patience of our teachers, staff, students, and parents as we work through the challenges of online-only classrooms. Even when the process has been frustrating, we are all working toward a common goal and are truly in this together.

Because teachers and students are used to quickly acclimating to new situations, we have seen many successes. Our attendance rate this fall with Comprehensive Distance Learning has been much higher than in the spring when we were forced to quickly shift to online learning. Making these daily connections will help bridge the gap until we are able to meet in person again.

When exactly that will be is among the biggest questions we're facing right now.

Safely reopening schools is the number one priority of the Hermiston School District. The Oregon Department of Education has set up guidelines for when students can return, including two very specific benchmarks — the number of new weekly cases and the test positivity rate countywide.

In order to bring all students back into

our buildings, Umatilla County must have no more than eight new COVID-19 cases a week for three weeks in a row. Bringing just K-3 students back into the classroom can be achieved at 24 new cases a week. The county must also have a positive test rate of less than 5%.

As a comparison, the county has averaged about 87 new cases for the past three weeks with a positive test rate of about 15%. We still have a ways to go, and it will take community-wide effort to stop the spread of coronavirus, reopen, and stay open.

And that's our goal. As much as we've learned about delivering online education, the person-to-person communication, class management and accountability are impossible to replicate online. We have many students who desperately need that connection with a teacher, and we won't be satisfied until we can offer that to every student.

As we continue to do our part to protect against the spread of coronavirus, we are busy planning for the future.

Using information collected from a series

of public surveys, the school board last week chose Loma Vista Elementary as the name for the new school to be built on Theater Lane. This keeps in the tradition of naming Hermiston elementary schools after local geographic features. Bidding on the construction of both Loma Vista and Rocky Heights, projects approved by voters in 2019, will begin in early 2021.

The Hermiston High School softball facility project will break ground on Tuesday, Sept. 29, and includes two fields, additional parking, concession stand, restroom, and a storage building. The fields will give the girls sports teams equitable access to a high-quality playing field at the school and have been a long time coming. We'll announce a time for the groundbreaking soon.

Through this challenging experience we are still feeling the support of this amazing community has for its students, teachers, and schools. It will be an unusual fall, but together we will make the most of it.

Dr. Tricia Mooney is superintendent of Hermiston School District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Greg Smith listens

Greg Smith is my friend. Our mutual interest in Stephen R. Covey was the beginning of our twenty-five year friendship.

One of Covey's Seven Habits, for which he became internationally renowned was, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Understanding is the result of intentional listening. Greg listens. He listens to his brilliant wife, Sherri. He listens to his friends. He listens to trends. He listens to his constituents. He listens to his colleagues. He listens to his employees.

He listens to his employers. He listens to his partners. He listens to those who testify in committee meetings. He listens in council meetings. He listens in commission meetings. He listens in session and out of session.

Our most recent conversations have been about the next three biennia. The economic impact of the pandemic, followed by the devastating fires has created unprecedented state revenue shortfalls. He has been gathering information so that he will be prepared to manage expectations and prioritize the greatest needs for all Oregonians.

He rarely sleeps. He serves others. He tells the truth.

I trust him. He's my friend.

Kim B. Puzey
Hermiston

You can't complain if you don't vote

On Nov. 3, we will have what I believe to be the most important election in the history of the United States. We will be given the choice between the free enterprise system and socialism.

Free enterprise will give us the choice to achieve the lifestyle we want if we are willing to do what is required to get it. It is up to you, not the government or someone else. You will get to keep what you earn for your work.

Socialism will be the government run-

ning your life and deciding what you need to live. It won't be your choice. Everywhere it has been tried, it has failed and usually ends up a totalitarian dictatorship.

It is up to you to decide what you want; if you don't vote, you can't complain. Pay close attention to what the candidates say: Is it the same to all groups or do they change to fit the group they are talking to? Listen to the words they use closely so you can really understand what they really mean. In the case of incumbents, have they voted like you think they should? If not, you may want to vote for someone else.

Be an informed voter and cast an informed vote.

Phillip Jarner
Hermiston