

Shopping:

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Despite doing well now, she said in April sales were “dismal” as retailers were ordered to offer curbside pickup only, and people were hunkering down at home. Since then, business owners have had to keep track of ever-changing restrictions as Umatilla County has gone through various phases, and Lara said she has appreciated help from the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce.

“The chamber has been awesome at keeping us abreast of changes, and what it means for your specific type of business,” she said.

Nadia Monroy is opening the doors to her new business for the first time on Wednesday, Nov. 25, and said she hopes to start off on the right foot with the surge in sales that usually comes for retailers during the holiday season.

After years of selling homemade soaps and other items at area bazaars, she is opening Bella Grace Boutique at 158 E. Main St. in Hermiston. The shop will sell women’s clothing, accessories and home décor.

“THE CHAMBER HAS BEEN AWESOME AT KEEPING US ABREAST OF CHANGES, AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOUR SPECIFIC TYPE OF BUSINESS.”

Julie Lara, co-owner of JB Brick Company

“I’ve always dreamed of opening my own storefront, and finally that dream came true,” she said.

Monroy said she knows it’s a risky time to be opening a business, but she has faith that it will work out. The hardest part, she said, is that businesses never know when another set of mandates relating to COVID-19 might come along and what they will look like.

“It has been nerve-racking, because I was afraid I wasn’t going to be able to open because of the freeze,” Monroy said.

Tammy James of 60 Minute Photo in Hermiston agreed that the uncertainty has added to the difficulty of the shutdowns this year. Under the current restrictions the photo studio can still operate, for example, but Gov. Kate Brown has warned that further action could be taken at the end

of the freeze if hospitalization numbers in the state are not trending in the right direction.

Usually, 60 Minute Photo has Santa visit every weekend in December, and families show up unannounced, forming long lines as they wait their turn. This year, appointments with Santa must be scheduled in advance in 10-minute increments, with time in between each session for sanitizing everything. They’re also offering holiday mini-sessions and other services, with COVID-19 protocols in place.

“Even the front counter, every time someone walks out, we’re re-sanitizing the counter,” James said.

She said the year has been difficult on businesses, but customers from Hermiston and the surrounding areas have been loyal, and 60 Minute Photo staff have

tried their best to protect those customers’ health in return.

“We do curbside,” she said. “If people call and say, ‘I have a health concern, I can’t come in,’ we say, ‘No problem, we’ll bring (the photos) out to you.’”

Kimberly Rill, executive director of the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber has been doing what it can to promote shopping locally during the holiday season.

they really want to do their best to follow the rules that have been set for them so that their business and others can stay open. She said in light of the 75% capacity rule currently in place, many retailers are planning to spread out their deals over several days instead of having one big event.

“I think you’ll see elongated promotions,” she said.

She said she’s “so proud” of local businesses for the way they’ve adapted this year.

also stated that 62% of U.S. small businesses “reported that they need to see consumer spending return to pre-COVID levels by the end of 2020 in order to stay in business.”

In addition to small businesses, the weekend after Thanksgiving represents a major sales spike for “big box” retailers as well. This year, many of those retailers have announced they are also spreading out their deals beyond just Black Friday, and offering sales online.

Walmart, for example, has been emphasizing a Deals for Days sale rather than a traditional Black Friday event. The promotion was rolled out in three phases — Nov. 4, Nov. 11 and Nov. 25. While the bulk of its holiday deals are available online and by pickup throughout the month, the company has stated on its website that it will be offering some in-store Black Friday deals starting at 5 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 27. During that sale, the website states, store capacity will be reduced and customers will be asked to wait in a socially distanced line outside the store for their turn to enter.

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Nadia Monroy, owner of Bella Grace Boutique

The chamber has been promoting businesses on its Facebook page and recently emailed out a list of what restaurants were providing takeout or delivery during the two-week freeze.

“Shop local, eat local, do local, spend local,” she said.

Rill said the main thing she’s hearing from local businesses right now is that

During their Nov. 9 meeting, the Hermiston City Council issued a proclamation in support of Small Business Saturday. The proclamation stated that according to the Small Business Administration, small businesses were responsible for 64.9% of net new jobs created from 2000 to 2018. It

Population:

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with developers still interested in building out more subdivisions in the city.

In Hermiston, Morgan said just two of the housing developers the city is currently working with represent about 350 planned new homes for Hermiston over the

next few years.

In the city’s news release, he suggested a few reasons for Hermiston’s continued housing growth, including “expansive work in 2017 through 2019 to actively build a deeper bench of housing developments just waiting for the right conditions to pull the trigger.” Historically low interest rates have helped pull that trigger, he said.

Morgan also referenced the city’s comparatively quick rebound in unemployment rates from the unprecedented spike in the spring. According to the news release, Umatilla County’s unemployment rate spiked to 13.9% in April 2020, but fell back to just 6.2% by September.

“Prior to 2020, the main concern that we heard from our business community

was access to a large enough workforce to meet their needs, and available housing was viewed as one of barriers to that need,” Morgan said. “I think the rapid and robust return of employment to our region from the sharpest economic decline on record tells me that supporting new housing development across western Umatilla County will continue to be a major need

in 2021 and beyond.”

Portland State University’s Population Research Center is the lead agency for the Oregon State Data Center, a state-level partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau. The PSU center creates detailed annual population estimates by analyzing birth records, death records, driver’s licenses, school enrollment, Medicare enrollment,

voter registrations and other records. The center also provides population projections to help government agencies plan for future growth, such as building new schools.

A preliminary population report is issued Nov. 15, and after allowing time for feedback from local officials and others that might be able to catch any errors, the estimates will be certified on Dec. 15.

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