



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A heated tent sits amid the fog outside The Pheasant Blue Collar Bar & Grill in Hermiston on Thursday, Dec. 3, 2020. This tent and others in town are used for outdoor dining in compliance with the most recent round of COVID-19 dining restrictions.

## Some restaurants add outdoor dining amid COVID-19 restrictions

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

It was 33 degrees during lunchtime on Friday, Dec. 4, but that didn't stop some restaurants from offering outdoor dining.

It also didn't stop some customers from taking them up on it.

"I don't mind sitting in the cold," Shawn Jordan said. "It's not bad."

Jordan was sitting under a large tent outside The Bridge in Umatilla, eating one of the bistro's signature pizzas. Next to his table, a large, gas-fired outdoor heater helped take the chill away.

He said he would rather sit and enjoy his food rather than take it home, and he is trying to continue supporting local businesses during the pandemic.

"We've still got to support restaurants," he said. "They're doing what they can to get whatever business they can."

Paulette Dufloth, who owns The Bridge with her husband, Daren Dufloth, said they purchased the heaters and tent after the newest set of state COVID-19 regulations were announced, allowing restaurants to add outdoor dining to their previously allowed takeout and delivery options.

"We try to evolve with the changes," she said.

Restaurants in Umatilla County have been on a journey of frequently shifting rules this year, getting put on takeout only rules three separate times — during the initial statewide shutdown in March, when Umatilla County got sent back to "baseline" status in August,



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A heated tent for outdoor dining sits in the parking lot of The Bridge in Umatilla on Monday, Dec. 7, 2020.

and when the state was put on a "freeze" in November. Restaurants were allowed to add outdoor seating, but not indoor dining, on Thursday, Dec. 3.

Dufloth said it's been a difficult year to be in the restaurant business, but at this point her family has invested too much in The Bridge to give up on it.

Under the current set of guidelines for COVID-19, restaurants in counties that are classified as an "extreme risk" level — currently including Umatilla and Morrow counties — can offer takeout, delivery or outdoor seating. The outdoor seating must have a limit of six people per table, and tents are supposed to be kept open on three sides when people are eating there.

Restaurant owners across the state have voiced complaints that they feel unfairly targeted compared to other businesses. In November, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association and the Restaurant Law Center filed

a joint complaint in federal court for injunctive relief from two-week freeze that lasted from Nov. 18 to Dec. 3.

Some local governments have tried to help ease the burden. In Hermiston, the city is offering downtown restaurants the use of its parking lots for outdoor seating, and donated \$15,000 to the Hermiston Downtown District to help with seating and other items needed. While most lots remain empty, The Pheasant Blue Collar Bar & Grill has a large white tent set up in the lot on Gladys Avenue behind its restaurant.

Owner Cherie Bumpaous said the tent can seat about 30 people, and features gas heaters and lap blankets for guests who want them. The restaurant is also offering take-out, and is open seven days a week.

"It's better than being closed," she said. "And customers seem to like it."

Customers can just come to the tent and wait to be

seated and served there, rather than ordering inside.

Bumpaous said it's been a difficult year for restaurants as they have seen a drop-off in sales and tried to keep up with ever-changing restrictions. She said they're trying the best they can to adapt, and to follow all the cleaning precautions that can help keep people safe.

"I just think restaurants are getting the short end of the stick, and some of them are going down," she said.

Outside of the downtown area, Midway Bar & Grill offered dining inside a canvas tent forming a dining space next to its building. The bar is "highly encouraging" people make reservations ahead of time to make sure there will be a table for them.

## County creates application for CARES Act relief

Small businesses that have been affected by COVID-19 can apply for grants until Dec. 15

By BRYCE DOLE  
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County businesses can now apply to receive economic support from the state-funded CARES Act, which provided the county with up to \$1.18 million in funds to be distributed to businesses that have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Businesses can apply for support until Dec. 15 on Umatilla County's website. The county "encourages applications from veterans, women, Black, indigenous, people of color, and tribal-owned businesses."

Businesses that will receive priority in receiving financial support will include those in the hospitality industry, such as restaurants, bars, wineries, breweries, hotels and motels. Other priority businesses will include those which had to shut down due to the two-week "freeze" initiated by Gov. Kate Brown, including fitness and entertainment establishments like gyms, theaters, bowling alleys and museums.

The amount of money that a business will receive will vary depending on the type of business and the economic impact COVID-19 has had. And businesses hoping to receive funds must meet a variety of requirements.

The business must be

headquartered and operate in the county, be required by law to be registered with the Oregon Secretary of State and be for-profit or tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the internal revenue code.

The business must also have also been either prohibited from operating during the two-week freeze initiated by Gov. Kate Brown, or show the pandemic caused at least a 25% decline in sales between March 1 and Nov. 30 in comparison to 2019.

The business must also employ 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees.

Certain companies will be ineligible to receive support. These include passive real estate holding companies, nonprofits that are not tax-exempt and businesses that have experienced a non-COVID-related decline in sales.

Businesses that are delinquent on taxes due on or before the date of the application will also be ineligible, as will those that do not comply with federal, state and local laws.

Businesses that have closed and do not intend to reopen, and "adult-oriented businesses that derive a majority of income from gambling activities," will also be ineligible to receive support.




The county intends to have the checks in the mail by Dec. 30.




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