

Center helps local businesses navigate pandemic

Business Resource Center plans to evolve as pandemic wanes

By KATY NESBITT FOR THE HERMISTON HERALD

A year ago the Umatilla Electric Cooperative's Business Resource Center opened to assist its business customers navigate federal and state relief funding opportunities affected by COVID-19 restrictions. Today the center is transitioning to help area businesses adapt to an ever-changing marketplace.

In April 2020, UEC first opened the center in Hermiston to provide businesses free assistance with grant applications for programs made available through the CARES Act, including the Paycheck Protection Program. It has since helped businesses with new assistance programs under the American Rescue Plan as well.

Executive Adviser Greg Smith said the center went from an idea to a reality in four days.

"UEC reached out to me just as the COVID crisis was beginning and asked for advice," Smith said. "They were concerned their business customers were not going to know how to access (Paycheck



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Workers sit behind clear panels at Umatilla Electric Cooperative's Business Resource Center in Hermiston on April 10, 2020. The center was set up to help businesses apply for Paycheck Protection Program loans.

Protection Program) and (Economic Injury Disaster Loan) funds. They asked, 'If we get you a space can you get up and running immediately?'"

Within a few days UEC opened the Business Resource Center in an office at 1475 N. First St. in Hermiston.

Emily Cecil, the lead business advisor at the center, said after

helping businesses access federal and state relief funding, the nature of assistance transitioned to creating websites to help managers adapt to the new norms of shopping online.

"We are here to help out in any way possible," Cecil said.

According to Steve Meyers, UEC's Member Services administrator, over the last year the center

has assisted 103 businesses in person, held 718 advising calls and 198 one-on-one advising meetings. To ensure the region's businesses were aware of the center's services, staff contacted every member of the Hermiston, Umatilla, Boardman and Pilot Rock chambers of commerce and reached 1,712 UEC members through email blasts.

Meyers said, "When the PPP began accepting applications last year confusion reigned as the complex and quickly assembled program unfolded nationwide, with tens of thousands of small business owners seeking immediate funding."

Now that the crises have subsided, the center's staff assists new businesses to launch and existing businesses to thrive in today's marketplace. Cecil said Smith held a webinar series for small businesses on YouTube that covered topics like creating a budget, advertising for vacancies and interviewing candidates.

Smith said he is pleased with the results of the progress over the last year and the center continues to grow.

"I think people appreciate that they can get free, one-on-one advising as they are starting or

expanding a business," Smith said.

Besides advice, Smith said the center can help business owners and budding entrepreneurs access UEC's revolving loan funds with interest rates at 3.25%.

With a recovering economy and job vacancies across northeastern Oregon, Smith said the center is moving into the housing arena and coordinating with Eastern Oregon University's internship program to develop housing projects.

Smith said the center's services will continue to evolve alongside the economy.

"We want to be flexible to meet the needs as they arise," Smith said. "It will be interesting to see where it goes from here."

UEC Board President Bryan Wolfe praised the center's work at the utility's annual meeting April 17.

"The center has become such an integral part of our community, and we have committed to funding it for at least one more year," Wolfe said.

For more information, call the center at 541-289-3000. Staff are available to advise businesses by phone, video conferencing or at the office. Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8-5 p.m., with a closure for lunch from 1-2 p.m.

Rondon named pest management director

HERMISTON HERALD

Dr. Silvia Rondon has been named as the new director of the Oregon Integrated Pest Management Center.



Rondon is a professor and entomology specialist at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center, and has worked there since 2006. While her new director job has typically been done from Corvallis, she said she negotiated to

work from HAREC for at least a couple of years so that she can also continue some of her work she has been doing in Eastern Oregon.

"Our entomology program will be kept going here at HAREC, maybe with some modifications," she said.

The Oregon IPM Center, part of Oregon State University, works to provide farmers in Oregon with sustainable pest management options that are affordable but also reduce harm to humans and the environment. Its projects range from research to educational programs.

Rondon's work at

HAREC has been part of that, but now she will also manage other researchers throughout the state and work to make their findings available to growers everywhere. She said she is excited to familiarize herself with the work being done in other parts of the state and figure out how to better pool their resources and skills.

"My colleagues are doing great things in different parts of the state, but I think what is missing is that connection, and looking at sharing resources," she said.

Rondon's specialty is entomology, or the study of insects, and she said a

majority of the work she is doing at HAREC now revolves around protecting potato crops. As part of the Oregon IPM Center, she will be working with experts more familiar with other crops and other pests, from weeds to fungi to birds.

The part of the job she is also looking forward to is the mentorship aspects, she said. She has enjoyed getting to mentor students and newer staff at HAREC and is looking forward to doing that more widely.

She also serves on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion task force for the Entomological Society of America.

Arrow Dental clinic opens with focus on Medicaid patients

By JADE MCDOWELL NEWS EDITOR

Moda Health is working to address shortfalls in rural access to dental care with the opening of Arrow Dental in Hermiston.

The clinic is focused mostly on serving patients on Medicaid, known in Oregon as the Oregon Health Plan. It is a full service dental clinic that includes pediatric specialists.

Moda opened the original Arrow Dental in Salem in

2014, and has since opened locations in Astoria, Clatskanie, Eugene, Milwaukie and Hermiston as well as a mobile clinic that serves patients in the Portland area.

Greg Hansen, director of dental Medicaid for Moda, said conversations with coordinated care organizations pinpointed Hermiston as an area with high need for more dentists who take Oregon Health Plan patients, particularly for providers

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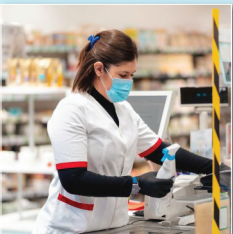
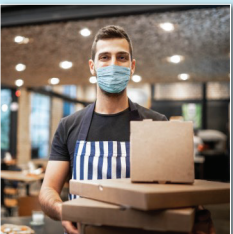

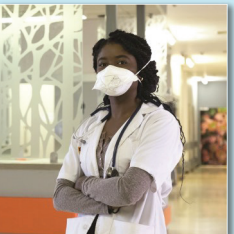
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