



## NEW IN TOWN

### Entrepreneurs regaining their confidence in restaurant industry

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

The state of Oregon still considers Umatilla County high risk for COVID-19, but some business owners see the county's economy as less risky.

After a tough year for OMG! Burgers and Brews in Pendleton, business is now booming for the three-year-old burger joint — so much so, that owners Rodney and Kimberly Burt are opening up a new OMG! Burgers location in Hermiston.

Rodney Burt said the new location will look the same as the Pendleton one, featuring a menu of appetizers, salads, hot dogs, chicken sandwiches, alcoholic beverages and “about 20 different types of crazy hamburgers.” The restaurant is set to open sometime in mid-July, in the former Union Club building at 201 E Main St.

“I think what will set us apart is that we use the best beef you can get, all local from around Pendleton and Hermiston — fresh, never frozen, no antibiotics — with fresh-baked buns, and produce as fresh as we can get them,” he said.

Pandemic restrictions took their toll on OMG! Burgers in Pendleton like everywhere else, Burt said. The couple were planning to open a grilled cheese shop in Pendleton in 2020, but COVID-19 scrapped those plans. Lately, however, Burt said OMG! Burgers has had its busiest time ever, helping them feel confident in taking the plunge in Hermiston.

#### 'It's definitely scary'

The Burts aren't the only ones opening new eateries in Hermiston.

In late March, Daily Fix Nutrition opened, offering protein shakes, teas and coffee.

Diana Pena, who opened the shop with her husband, Felipe Pena, said they were looking at the 11th Street location they settled in before the pandemic started, but the shutdowns and uncertainty caused them to pull back for a while before finally “taking a leap of faith” this spring.

“It's definitely scary, because you see so many businesses struggling,” she said.

Pena graduated from Umatilla and her husband graduated from Stanfield, so they “met in the middle” to live in Hermiston after getting married. She said she has been using Herbalife Nutrition products for about seven years, and eventually started selling them to other people. Now, Daily Fix Nutrition sells all Herbalife products, including meal replacement shakes.

“We wanted to bring something healthy and new to the community,” she said.

Hermiston has a few more new developments in the restaurant industry coming up, including “new and exciting changes” promised by Ye Olde Pizza Shoppe, which has used the pandemic shutdowns to renovate its space on North First Street.

Area residents can also expect more food truck options soon after a renovation of the city's Orchard Avenue food truck pod that will take place next month, adding utility hookups for truck owners who have said they would be happy to join the pod if they could have access to water and sewer.

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Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Elizabeth Stuart-Ramirez pours a drink Thursday, June 17, 2021, at the newly opened Daily Fix Nutrition in Hermiston.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

The upstairs dining room at the former Union Club building in Hermiston sits empty Thursday, June 17, 2021, as OMG! Burgers & Brew prepares to convert the space to a new location for the Pendleton-based eatery.

## Hermiston sets sights on new east-west corridor

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

The city of Hermiston is hoping to leverage some of its American Rescue Plan dollars to push the timeline up for a road project that would create a new east-west corridor through town.

Dubbed GRATE, which stands for Gettman Road/Railway Alternative Transportation Enhancement, the project is divided into four phases totaling \$8.6 million.

The first phase would pave the existing portion of Gettman Road, which runs along the southwestern edge of town near Armand Larive Middle School.

The second phase would extend Gettman to Highway 395, creating a new connection between highways 395 and 207. The third phase would replace and widen a bridge on Southeast 10th Street, and the fourth would rebuild and widen Northeast 10th Street, creating a better route north to Highway 730.

The GRATE project has been listed in the city's capital improvement plan as a wish list item without a defined timeline, but Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said the city is seeing an opportunity to tap into several new funding sources, including American Rescue Plan stimulus funding from the state and the Community Proj-



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A street sign marks the intersection of Gettman Road and First Street in Hermiston on Tuesday, June 22, 2021. The city of Hermiston is hoping to use some of its American Rescue Plan funds to create a new paved east-west corridor along Gettman Road.

ect Funding that will allow members of Congress to earmark funds for local projects.

Congressional delegates and state legislators have been reaching out to cities in their districts, Morgan said, and “this is one we've been pressing as our top priority.”

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, Hermiston School District leaders and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have written letters of support for the project, noting it will relieve congestion in town. The CTUIR wrote that extending

Gettman Road would make it easier to plan efficient routes for the HART bus system run by Kayak Public Transit in Hermiston.

For the school district, Armand Larive Middle School and Desert View Elementary School are right off Gettman Road. But a pro-

vision of building Armand Larive was that the district could not send school buses down Gettman Road until it is paved, which sends buses on a long detour that increases traffic near Hermiston High School at its busiest times of day.

“Not only does this additional mileage increase greenhouse gas emissions, but the crossing which they must utilize routes them through the heavily congested intersection of (South First Street and Highland Avenue),” Superintendent Tricia Mooney wrote.

Paving and extending Gettman would create a straight shot from the Mid Columbia Bus company barn on Airport Road to the two schools.

Morgan said the southeast area where Gettman Road is located continues to grow, and has capacity for 300 to 400 more single-family homes, without counting a large acreage off Highway 207 and Feedville Road that developers through the years have expressed interest in turning into a subdivision of up to 1,000 homes.

“There's a pretty significant potential for housing growth there,” he said.

The GRATE project could help support that growth, he said, and relieve congestion on Highland Avenue and Elm Avenue, the city's other east-west corridors that run the length of town.

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