

Restaurants:

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Delish Bistro is moving down the road, from a location that only allowed for outdoor seating to a full sit-down restaurant location at 1619 N. First St. They hope to open by the end of the month.

A smoothie shop called Get Fit Nutrition will open soon in the former Yo Country Yogurt building on the corner of Hurlburt Avenue and Southeast Third Street. Owner Laura Davis said she wanted to open it not only to provide healthy options for the community, but also to provide a “cool place where people can hang out, get distracted and forget about this pandemic that it’s affecting all of us.”

She doesn’t yet know exactly when she will be able to open, because she is waiting on an inspection from the health department.

That’s a common refrain from local restaurant owners who aren’t ready to announce an opening date yet.

Burt said OMG! Burgers is hoping to open their Hermiston location in mid-July, but that will all depend on how quickly they are able to hire enough staff, and how quickly they can get the green light from Umatilla County Public Health. Every day they can’t check off those items is revenue lost, he said.

Health department holdups

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara acknowledged that waits for food service plan reviews have been longer than usual for the past year.

That hasn’t been because of more requests from restaurants than normal, he said, but rather that staff have been far more busy with other things, including vaccinations and reviewing plans for events to see if they meet the criteria for COVID-19 protocols.

“A lot of that fell to the environmental health folks,” Fiumara said.

He said when it came to choosing between sending environmental health staff to a restaurant or staffing a vaccination clinic, he chose the latter, knowing that the more quickly Umatilla County residents were protected by vaccines, the sooner the economy could safely reopen.

While Umatilla County was in what was first known as baseline



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Elizabeth Stuart-Ramirez affixes the lid to a to-go cup Thursday, June 17, 2021, after preparing a drink at Daily Fix Nutrition in Hermiston.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Owners Diana and Felipe Pena opened Daily Fix Nutrition this spring on 11th Street in Hermiston.

and later changed to extreme risk — for more days than any other county in the state, thanks to its high spread of COVID-19 — the health department wasn’t allowed by the state to do on-site inspections at all unless responding to a complaint. That not only hindered inspections, but also made it difficult to get a new environmental health staff member trained.

“So many restaurants were forced into new methods of operation, but at the same time, we were

not allowed to do inspections,” Fiumara said.

Requests for site plan reviews for restaurants, bars, food trucks and other eating establishments actually stayed fairly steady year over year, Fiumara said. In the first half of 2019, there were 21 requests. In the first half of 2020, there were 20. This year so far there have been 22.

He said the number for 2020 might not show the whole picture — several of those were before the

pandemic began, and there is no guarantee all of the sites that submitted plans for review actually opened. He also noted that 2020 saw an unusually high percentage of reviews go to mobile units, as some owners tried to pivot away from indoor dining.

Fiumara said the health department is advertising for another environmental health position and also has brought back an environmental health supervisor position previously cut, which, once everything is in place, will boost the number of people able to handle site plan reviews and inspections.

There is other good news for restaurant owners opening now, as well. When the health department has been using environmental health staff for vaccination events and other duties, they have been paying them from a different pool of money than what the county sets aside for environmental health. As a result of those savings to that department budget, Fiumara said, they have temporarily reduced all licensed facility fees by 40%.

“We knew (the fees) wouldn’t be something that will make or break an operation over a year, but it’s something we could do, so we felt we needed it,” he said.

Cool Rides gears up for 25th annual event in July

By TAMMY MALGESINI
COMMUNITY WRITER

The Hermiston Classics Car Club is getting revved up for its 25th annual car show.

The Cool Rides Car Show is July 9-10 at McKenzie Park, 320 S. First St., Hermiston. The vehicle entry fee is \$25. People are encouraged to register in advance at www.hermistonclassicscarclub.com. The first 100 entries will receive an event T-shirt free of charge.

Juan Lopez, club president, is excited for the event — especially after having to cancel in 2020. Lopez hopes people will not only enter their vehicles but come out and enjoy the day in the park. People don’t have to belong to the car club to enter the show or to join the Friday night fun, Lopez said.

“We have some special things coming in,” he said. “The National Guard will be there and we’ll have a couple of other special things in the park for people to see.”

On-site registration is Saturday, July 10, from 7-10 a.m. at the park. The car show will kick off with the singing of the national anthem at 9 a.m. by the Hermiston High School choir. The awards presentation, which will include nearly two dozen categories, begins at 1 p.m.

The club will host a poker run Friday, July 9. To participate in the poker run, head to McKenzie Park to pick up a map and scorecard. The cost is \$5 per hand. Participants will have from 6-7 p.m. to collect the cards for their poker hands. At 7 p.m., the club will host a dinner and determine winners of the poker run. The car club will provide the meal and beverages.

The Hermiston Classics Car Club is made up of local car enthusiasts, who get together to support each other with vehicle-related projects.

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