

Law enforcement not spared from hiring woes

Hermiston police among departments facing trouble

By ALEX WITTWER
EO Media Group

Add law enforcement officers to the growing list of professions feeling the brunt of a labor shortage and facing hiring woes.

Police departments in Hermiston, Pendleton, La Grande and Baker City have had little luck finding applicants for their open positions recently, and the police chiefs are often flummoxed about the reasons why.

The Hermiston Police Department, which is budgeted for 28 officers, is down by six, according to Jason Edmiston, Hermiston police chief. Illness and injury account for most of the missing officers, he said, though a couple of the open positions, he added, were because people “had enough” of the work.

In a recent interview, Edmiston blamed the “climate” of the time. Modern divisiveness and negativity have troubled a “noble profession,” he said. It has reached the point, his department is having difficulty attracting new recruits, the chief said.

“It’s been extremely challenging trying to get numbers, quality applicants,” he said.

He had thought there would be a “mass exodus” of officers from larger cities to join departments in small towns like Hermiston, he said. Edmiston added he is not seeing this, though.

These days, when he posts an opening, he has around 10 applicants, the chief said. He said when he was hired there were 75 applicants for each position.

Other chiefs are facing the same issues.

“We’ve had zero applicants,” said Ty Doby, Baker City Police chief.

Doby, who worked for 25 years for Oregon State Police before joining the Baker City Police Department in 2019,

See Police, Page A8



Thanksgiving SPIRIT

Hermiston Community Fellowship Dinner persists despite missing much fellowship

Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Volunteers package to-go meals Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021, for the Community Fellowship Dinner at Hermiston High School.

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Volunteers stood beside containers of roast turkey dinners with all the trimmings Thursday, Nov. 25, Thanksgiving morning, minutes ahead of the Community Fellowship Dinner. Hundreds of meals were ready for distribution. To get them, all anyone had to do was drive up and reach out their hands.

It was an event that was emotional for some of the volunteers, including Heather Smart, who said she and others were working “for the love of the community.”

Smart, who was in charge of the kitchen, said she has been working at the event since 2014.

“I was doing nothing for Thanksgiving, and I wanted to do something,” she said. “I felt the need,

and I looked for something until I found this.”

As a head cook at Good Shepherd Health Care System, her skills and experience were useful to this cause.

“It makes me feel better as a person in the community,” she said. “It’s fulfilling to see that we’re helping so many people.”

As tears welled up in her eyes, Smart explained she was immensely

touched by the outpouring of donations and effort that made this event possible. It would not be feasible without many caring, loving people, she said; it is a testament to the goodness of the community.

Another volunteer, Ryan Greene, said he was doing this work because he enjoys helping people.

“A lot of people are lonely, especially if they don’t have family around or if they are in a position in which they don’t have money for food,” he said.

Community Fellowship Dinner Chairman Gary Humphreys explained the history of the event, dating back to the early 1980s. It started, he said, with families who were eating meals in an apartment building when it dawned on them that they were eating alone and that it would be better to share a meal together.

In 1982, around 20 of the apartment residents got together for dinner. They enjoyed the experience so much, they wanted to keep doing it, Humphreys said. What is more, he said, they wanted to invite others. The idea caught on, snowballing to

create bigger and bigger turnouts.

As Humphreys told the story, participation for the community dinners grew so much, they needed additional space. They moved to a local church, then a senior center and, finally, Hermiston High School.

The school, which has held the event ever since, is an excellent facility, he said. It has a large kitchen for food preparation, and they are helped by school staff.

COVID-19 threw a wrench into the gears, Humphreys said. No longer was it safe to bring the community together for people to enjoy face-to-face interaction. Instead, he said, the event shifted so volunteers were preparing food and handing it to people as they passed by in cars.

The dinner provided 1,300 meals in 2020 for Thanksgiving and another 1,000 for Christmas, he said, and he expected the same amount this year. For this Thanksgiving, the meals used 1,000 pounds of turkey.

See Thanksgiving, Page A8



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Volunteers package to-go meals Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021, at Hermiston High School for the Community Fellowship Dinner.

Bazaar marks bustling beginning to holiday shopping in Hermiston

More than 60 vendors set up shop at annual event

By BRYCE DOLE
Hermiston Herald

It’s Christmastime in Hermiston.

For some, that means it’s time to shop. More than 1,000 people flocked to the Hermiston Community Center and The Arc Umatilla County on Saturday, Nov. 27, for the annual Christmas Bazaar.

The event featured more than 60 vendors, and some “overflow” vendors were moved to The Arc Umatilla County nearby, according to Diana Picard, the city’s

recreation coordinator and the manager of the community center.

Picard said this year’s bazaar was the biggest yet — so big that organizers had to turn away at least 40 vendors. Picard said she was unsure why this year saw so many more vendors, but she assumed that many people had taken up creative hobbies during the pandemic and were ready to put their products on display.

Vendors remarked on the bazaar’s bustling atmosphere. Crowds of people meandered through the center browsing ornaments, woodwork, paintings, jewelry, crochet hats, bath bombs and other types of goods. The air was filled with the smell of holiday

fragrances and baked goods.

Shoppers said they were excited to be out supporting local businesses after months where the pandemic shuttered them and brought both supply chain and hiring woes. Many purchased holiday gifts for loved ones, noting the special feeling of shopping local rather than buying online through Amazon and other shopping websites.

“This is a way to connect with each other,” Picard said. “It’s a place to see the people you haven’t in a while.”

And shoppers were eager to buy. Stephanie Walchli saw that firsthand. Next to her crochet table, she watched as her parents’ wood tables were

completely sold out before 11 a.m., hours before the event was scheduled to end. By noon, the tables were clear and her family had left.

Walchli’s day was busy, too. She said she typically makes around \$200 at a bazaar, which she had successfully made halfway through her day on Nov. 27.

A substitute teacher, Walchli taught herself to crochet. She enjoyed seeing other creative artisans reap the benefits of their hobbies at the bazaar.

“You see the results of months of work,” she said.

Some vendors said the bazaar is one of their biggest sales days. And this year was even more important after the stresses the pandemic placed on small businesses.



Bryce Dole/Hermiston Herald

Shoppers and employees of Scentsy, a fragrance company, talk about holiday products Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021, at the Hermiston Christmas Bazaar. Racquel Rodriguez, a Hermiston-based consultant for Scentsy, said the bazaar is one of the biggest events of the year for sales. She said the event is essential for local businesses to connect with clientele.

That was the case for Racquel Rodriguez, a Hermiston consultant for the fragrance company Scentsy. During pandemic shutdowns, Rodriguez said she was unable to hold “home parties” to show-

case products in a home. That slowed business, and made Rodriguez all the more grateful for the community support on a busy Nov. 27.

See Bazaar, Page A8