

Business Notes

Oregon employers still have difficulty finding qualified employees

Many private-sector employers in Oregon have had difficulty filling openings during the past year, according to a recent Oregon Employment Department survey of Oregon employers. Two-thirds of all private-sector employers (almost 60,000) tried to hire employees during the 12 months prior to the survey. Over one-third of these recently-hiring employers reported having a high level of difficulty filling either regular, year-round openings or seasonal openings in at least

one occupational group. Survey respondents indicated they had the most difficulty filling regular, year-round management, professional, production, construction and agricultural job openings. Sales, service, computer-related and clerical job openings were somewhat easier to fill.

This hiring difficulty was similar across all regions of the state, but varied somewhat by industry. Computer-related jobs were mentioned as hard to fill by a larger share of survey

respondents in the manufacturing industry and in the finance, insurance and real estate industry than in other industries. Responses indicating that professional jobs were hard to fill were concentrated in the services industry. Sales jobs received more frequent mentions as hard to fill by employers in the wholesale and retail trade industry. Production jobs were mentioned most frequently by respondents in the manufacturing industry.

Over half of private-sector respondents feel that the "na-

ture of the work" is a main factor making it difficult for them to find qualified applicants for their most difficult-to-fill occupations. Low pay, lack of benefits, few career opportunities and lack of full-time work are somewhat less commonly cited factors. Location was mentioned more frequently as a main factor by respondents in several rural regions.

One-third or more of private-sector respondents said that difficulty finding qualified workers had lowered productivity, increased cost of recruitment, reduced product or service quality, lowered minimum qualifications for applicants or reduced output or sales; however, almost one-third of respondents said difficulty finding qualified workers had not noticeably affected their organizations.

The Employment Department undertook the survey of Oregon employers in order to

increase understanding of the specific work force issues they face. During this period of relatively low unemployment rates in parts of Oregon and continued industrial transition in other parts, the survey sought to go beyond the "hard data" to find out what employers are struggling with, what skills their employees are lacking, and what they want from the work force development system.

The findings above, and many more, are included in a report that is now available in electronic format and in print. The electronic format document is available through the OLMIS Web site: <www.olmis.org/Publications/> in both Acrobat Reader (PDF) and HTML formats. The printed version of the report is available by contacting Curtis Thrapp at 503-947-1204 or 1-800-327-3710, ext. 71204; by fax at 503-947-1210 or by e-mail at Curtis.M.Thrapp@state.or.us.

West Oregon juggles power supply costs, options

By Jim Buxton

Congress in 1936 created an agency known as the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), to provide loans to bring electric power to rural areas, and in 1946 to bring telephones to rural America. The Agency is presently known as Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

It was difficult for private companies to bring power to rural areas due to the miles of line that had to be built to supply few customers. People in

this area enjoy electric power since the formation of West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) in 1944.

History is repeating itself with the coming of the Internet. Private companies find it much more profitable to provide high-speed Internet access to populated areas. High-speed access to the Internet has become important because more and more commerce is conducted over the Internet. No longer is it necessary for many

companies to locate in urban areas to do business.

Until now, WOEC's focus has been electric power. Now, it is studying the possibility of getting involved in high-speed telecommunications. This is worth watching. Manager Russell Green has written an article on this subject in the upcoming Ruralite magazine.

In November Board action, the directors decided to wait until after the December 12 Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) meeting to see what rate structures are being proposed. WOEC is a member of Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative (PNGC), which means it can either purchase power directly from BPA or receive a "slice" of a block of power purchased by PNGC from BPA. It is generally anticipated that a larger purchase would command a better price, but PNGC is wondering how BPA will treat the "Slicers." Slicers may be treated fairly, but costs may be higher. The first "Off Ramp," or opportunity for WOEC to back out of the "slice" deal comes during the 30 days after the BPA meeting. If BPA actually meets on schedule, the deadline will be January 12.

Sunset tunnel repairs scheduled

Motorists headed to the coast should anticipate lane restrictions and some overnight closures on U.S. 26 beginning next month as crews perform additional structural repairs to the Sunset Tunnel.

The approximately \$150,000 project is expected to begin in mid-December and be completed by no later than January 15. The Oregon Department of Transportation will hold two public meetings to explain the repair work, provide construction schedules and discuss potential traffic impacts.

The first meeting will be held December 6 from 7:00 to 8:30 pm at Camp 18 Restaurant, located on Highway 26 at Milepost 18. A second meeting is planned for December 7 in Seaside at the Pig 'N Pancake Restaurant, 323 Broadway. That meeting begins at 8:30 a.m.

The tunnel will be limited to one lane during the majority of the work with traffic controlled by flaggers. Full closure of the tunnel is expected for approximately four nights between 8:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.

Rabies clinic at Humane Society

A low cost rabies clinic will be held in St. Helens at the Humane Society/County Animal Control Shelter at 2084 Oregon Street on Saturday, December 9, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Shots will be given by Dr. John Evans of Midway Veterinary Hospital. A second clinic will be Saturday, January 27 and a third is scheduled February 24 (same hours, price, location). The cost

is \$6.00 for rabies shots. Most other shots are available. Microchips will also be available for your pets.

All dogs must be on leashes and under their owners' control; cats must be suitably contained.

For more information, call Columbia Humane Society at 1-503-397-4353.

Two people needed for Fair Board seats

Two positions on the Columbia County Fair Board will be open in January 2001. Anyone interested in becoming a member, please call the Fair office at 503-543-4231. The next Fair Board meeting is December 11 at 7:00 p.m. in the 4-H Building at the fairgrounds.

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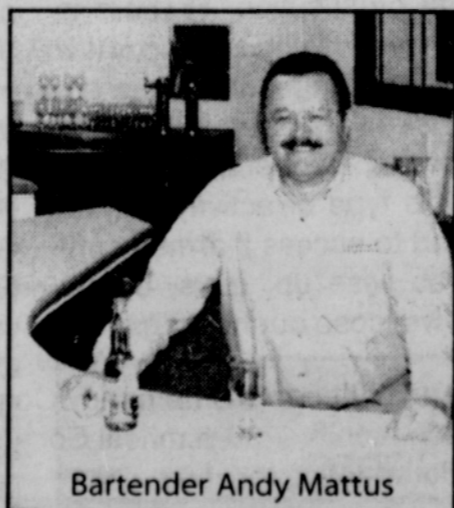
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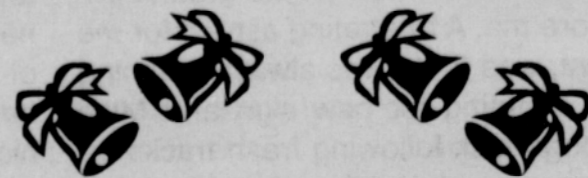
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