



FILE/Daily Courier

Maria Hawkins, left, director of First Call Resolution's Grants Pass location, and Katheryn Carnahan, First Call senior vice president, are shown at the company's call center in downtown Grants Pass. The company's local operation has grown from 57 employees to 243 since it opened in November 2009.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Anthony Brinkley of Cary's Candy in Grants Pass packages a run of Trail Toffee in which customers can mix their own blend of fruit, shown in the foreground, with a choice of toffee flavors. Cary's ships its products to customers nationwide, producing about 175,000 pounds of toffee and other candy a year.

Local economy continues comeback from recession

Growing businesses, such as First Call, leading the charge

By Jeff Duewel and Jim Moore
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Five years after a nationwide economic collapse, Josephine County is showing signs of recovery.

One business in downtown Grants Pass operates quietly and out of view, but contributes mightily to the local economy. It has also experienced significant growth over the past four years.

First Call Resolution, a call center with international clients, has 243 employees and a payroll of \$200,000 every two weeks. Call centers typically serve numerous clients who deal with large volume of calls for everything from marketing to donations for charity or politics.

"Our customers are all from out of town," First Call President John Stadter said. That means the payroll is all outside money coming into the community.

First Call opened in Grants Pass in November 2009 and initially hired 57 employees. It has been adding employees ever since, reaching its current level of 243. Stadter isn't surprised by the growth in Grants Pass.

"We've been growing at a good rate. We've definitely seen the economy move out of the recession, and we've seen the Southern Oregon economy pick up," Stadter said.

He's seen growth throughout Oregon in the past year.

First Call opened a new center in Veneta in September and has a total of five centers. There are two in Roseburg and one in Coos Bay.

"We've added 200 people in the last year," Stadter added.

The growth at First Call is indicative of what's going on elsewhere in Josephine County and across the state.

The Oregon Employment Department in January reported that employment grew by 1.8 percent in Southern Oregon in 2013. In fact, every area of the state added jobs except eastern Oregon, which dropped by less than 1 percent due the closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

Overall, the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped to 7 percent in December compared to 8.3 percent in December 2012. In Josephine County, the rate in December was still high at 9.9 percent, but that's a vast improvement over the 11.6 percent of a year ago.

The best news of all is that the state added 37,300 jobs between November 2012 and November 2013. More jobs were created in 2013 than in 2011 and 2012 combined.

The growth was due to the private sector which added 38,900 jobs in that period while there was a loss of 1,600 jobs in the government sector.

Oregon's private-sector employment growth is expected to hold fairly steady for the next few years, according to the



SHAUN HALL/Daily Courier

Merlee Milburn of Taylor's Sausage serves customer Damon Cox of Brookings. Taylor's is a well-known restaurant and meat outlet in the heart of Cave Junction.



JEFF DUEWEL/Daily Courier

Playcraft Systems, built by Krauss Craft in its Merlin factory, fill up parks around the world, including Schroeder Park and just about every other playground in and around Grants Pass.

latest Oregon Economic and Revenue Forecast from the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. If it does, Oregon should finally make a full recovery from the recession by the middle of 2015, regaining the nearly 150,000 jobs

lost between 2008 and early 2010.

These numbers provide a clinical look at how the economy is slowly accelerating, but the best way to relate that story is through the experiences of other local businesses.

the business in 1980 after both were out of high school. That boosted the number of employees to five or six, Terry said.

"We were selling retail out of a kitchen, but the feds said we couldn't do that, so we built a retail shop and hired three more people," he said.

Two of Scott and Terry's aunts had the idea of adding a mail order business to the mix. That combined with a brisk game-processing enterprise boosted them to a dozen employees by 1990.

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—JOHN STADTER
First Call president

Terry had added a hot dog steamer, primarily for his own use, in 1985, but it wasn't long before they were selling hot dogs on buns with chips on the side. That naturally grew to selling various sandwiches.

"In 1998, I noticed about 35 people sitting in cars during lunch eating hot dogs or sandwiches," he said.

That led to purchasing a former grocery store building in downtown Cave Junction and converting it into Taylor's Country Store. They expanded their hours to meet a growing demand and added some new products and with that came more employees.

Now the factory has grown to 70 employees, Terry said, and there are almost 30 people working at the store. "It's a labor-intensive product," he said, and it's been growing every year.

Another food-oriented company in the region is Cary's Candy, located in south Grants Pass. Cary's ships its products to customers nationwide, producing about 175,000 pounds of toffee and other candy a year.

"We did a little better last year than we did the year before, so that's a plus," says Brigitte Nickel, marketing director for Cary's of Oregon. "This year looks a little more positive ... and we're just looking at what markets we want to focus on this year."

While not a large year-round employer, the company has 10 employees during much of the year, then expands to 30 or so in the fall and winter to deal with brisk holiday business.

When it comes to expanding the company in the future, Nickel says, "One thing we're looking into is being able to keep those employees year-round."

One company that is experiencing a strong rebound is Krauss Craft, the playground manufacturing giant in the North Valley Industrial Park north of Grants Pass.

Born in Kurt Krauss' Illinois Valley garage nearly a quarter-century ago, and now occupying a 160,000-square-foot factory with 130 employees, Krauss Craft sends brightly-colored, state-of-the-art playgrounds to several countries.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Cary's Candy offers several all-natural, gluten-free toffee and gift packages.

A key player in the Illinois Valley's economy is Taylor's Sausage, with its country store and factory in Cave Junction.

Terry Taylor, who with his brother Scott and father Charles, owns and operates the business, said the company has 99 employees, the largest company in the Cave Junction area.

Not only that, it's shown steady growth over the years since his father moved the business to town in 1970. There was a sausage kitchen, a meat counter and a smokehouse at that time.

"He had a total of three people working for him," Terry Taylor said.

The popularity of the family's sausage recipe, which originated in Europe, propelled the business to continued growth. Terry and Scott joined