

Product, weather gauge pushcart's success

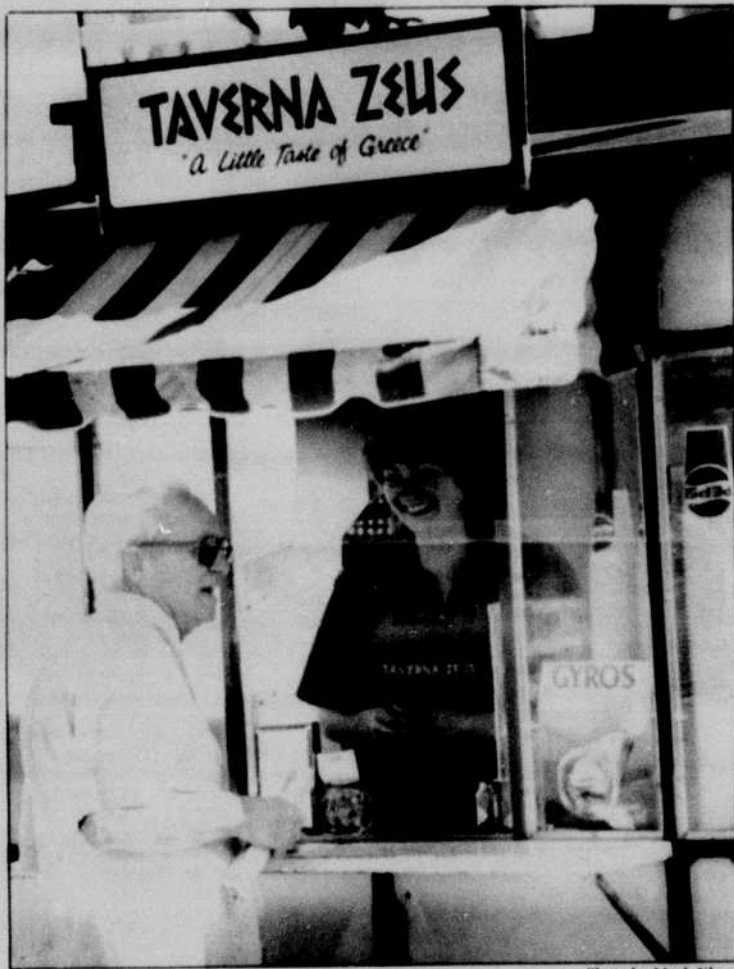


Photo by Mark Ylen

Taverna Zeus' Libby Gilbert exchanges a smile with Mike Sceletti, a regular at the pushcart. The success of the local pushcart business depends on the weather and the product sold, say some vendors. Only a few businesses have survived for more than one year.

By Hon Walker
Emerald Reporter

Pushcart vendors selling everything from sushi to crepes to flowers have been a part of the Eugene downtown mall for more than 10 years.

Since the first carts opened their windows to customers, some have profited, but many have shut down after less than a year of operation. Downtown cart merchants agree that profits depend on the weather and the products sold, and unique challenges can arise from a unique enterprise.

One downtown pushcart business that has succeeded is Cart de Frisco, which was created by University alumnus Kit Tangtrongjita in 1980. Cart de Frisco was among the first group of carts at the downtown mall.

Tangtrongjita operated the cart at the mall himself until 1985, and he has since expanded the business to four carts with the possible addition of franchises in the future.

"I believe in simplicity, and the pushcart concept is simple," he said.

Customers are attracted to the combination of a unique product and an appealing cart design, he said. "The whole concept behind all this is architecture and industry combined."

Cart de Frisco is "something that started small and went

big," said Dawnie Carlson, an employee who has been serving drinks and "Eugene's own sandwiches" from the downtown cart during the past year.

Business at Cart de Frisco usually is brisk, rain or shine, Carlson said. "The weather doesn't affect us too much because we do have regulars" who frequent the carts downtown and near the University on a weekly or even daily basis, she said.

However, the growing profitability of Cart de Frisco may be the exception rather than the rule to the downtown pushcart industry.

Lavelle Prater sliced a long strip of dough inside the cramped Fri-jo's Swedish Pastry cart as she spoke about the "good old days" of about five years ago. About a dozen pushcart businesses graced the downtown mall then, she said, many of which lasted less than one year.

The Fri-jo's cart has been open for 11 years, making it one of the oldest surviving businesses of its kind at the mall.

During the 10 years she has worked at the Fri-jo's cart, Prater has seen other vendors selling food ranging from burritos and corned beef sandwiches to cuisine from India and Cuba. Most memorable, she said, was Lulu's, a cart which sold cider-based fruit drinks.

Many of the short-lived push-

cart businesses go under because of the commitment that is required of the entrepreneur, said Janice Bohman of the Eugene Planning, Development and Building Department. Bohman is manager of the downtown mall.

Some merchants are unprepared to operate their carts five hours a day, five days a week, which is the minimum time recommended by the city's pushcart program. Some carts are open seven days a week.

"The business of those that have been here awhile is constant, but new ones can struggle," she said.

Some downtown cart vendors whose businesses do poorly find that they can make almost the same profit by working one day at Saturday Market, Bohman said.

Many carts, she said, folded when "the amount of work wasn't worth what they were making" financially. In addition, "They need a good product to make it worthwhile down here. It has to make people stop when they walk by."

Besides economic challenges, cart vendors face difficulties unique to their trade. For example, hauling a cart into a warehouse each night can be an inconvenience.

"For five years we had to take (the Fri-jo's cart) off the

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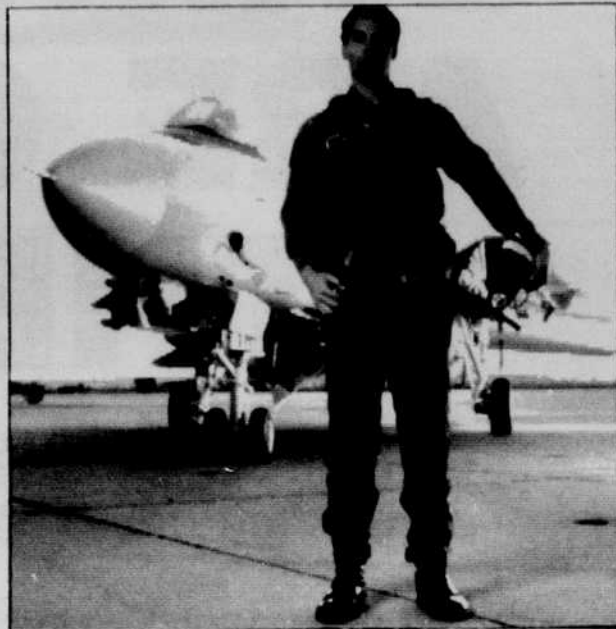
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Promoters may hold fate of new ice rink

By Bevin Gilmore
Emerald Contributor

The Lane County Fairgrounds will soon be home to a recreational ice skating rink again and a new horse arena in the bargain. But the success or failure of the ice rink may lie with its promoters, Fairgrounds Manager Steve McCulloch said.

When the idea of an ice rink first was proposed, a market

feasibility study was commissioned by the county. The study concluded that the existing population base was adequate support for the rink.

The study also projected a nine-month season (September through May), based on projected demand and climatological factors. The more typical facility operates 12 months a

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