

# Life in the Valley



## When the water-wheel turns

Colby and Diana Lamb made their home four miles east of Gates in the fall of 2016. A retired machinist, Colby Lamb discovered that the "Niagara water wheel" was part of the couple's property, and he's taken on the project of putting the spin back into it. JUSTIN MUCH/STAYTON MAIL

### Historic tool remains a local attraction today

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In the fall of 2016 when Colby and Diana Lamb looked into moving to Niagara, four miles east of Gates, they noticed the curious water wheel alongside Hwy. 22.

"I saw it, but I had no idea that it was on the property," Colby Lamb told KYAC FM radio host Ken Cartwright "As a machinist, it looked like the best toy in the world to work on."

That toy quickly became an undertaking, one of many the Lambs, Portlanders of 30 years, have taken up in "retirement" at their rustic Santiam Canyon digs.

Lamb frequently chats up visitors who stop by to photograph the wheel.

He's learned that it was installed in 1984, built by Mike Adams Construction in Stayton, brought to the site in pieces, then assembled and welded together.

"Initially, there was no intended purpose, other than a roadside attraction," Lamb said. "The original owner was Henry Hiebert. He previously put up a wooden water-wheel, about the same size, but it failed. It became too heavy for the bearings, perhaps from water or ice."

Replacing the wooden wheel was no small endeavor: the current wheel is 25 feet in diameter and weighs about 8,000 pounds. Lamb said the cost in 1984 was about \$8,000.

Age and attrition eventually halted the rotation. Lamb was able to get it spinning briefly for a demonstration, but it hasn't consistently turned since 2011.

Turning back time and getting the wheel spinning again is now his aim, which delights many canyon folks who cherish the icon.

"The water wheel has served as a landmark for decades and is one of our more recognizable attractions, and we appreciate the Lambs' dedication to restoring this historical feature," said Michelle Gates of the North Santiam Chamber of Commerce. "We often hear from visitors that they enjoy stopping and photographing the 'Niagara Water Wheel.'"

"It's people like the Lambs who



"The water wheel has served as a landmark for decades and is one of our more recognizable attractions, and we appreciate the Lambs' dedication to restoring this historical feature," Michelle Gates of the North Santiam Chamber of Commerce said regarding the wheel on the Lamb's property. JUSTIN MUCH /STAYTON MAIL

#### Online

Visit [www.gofundme.com/niagara-water-wheel-restoration](http://www.gofundme.com/niagara-water-wheel-restoration)

really serve as catalysts for creating and maintaining our historical heritage."

The tasks of the toy have been many, including clearing clogging mud from a 4-inch feeder pipe, recentering the wheel on its axel, power washing and repainting, fortifying the supporting slope and replacing the bearing. On Tuesday, Jan. 9, Lamb said he had obtained a new bearing, a sealed one that won't require as much hands-on greasing, for \$1,400. Installing the bulky piece will be a weighty, laborious task in itself.

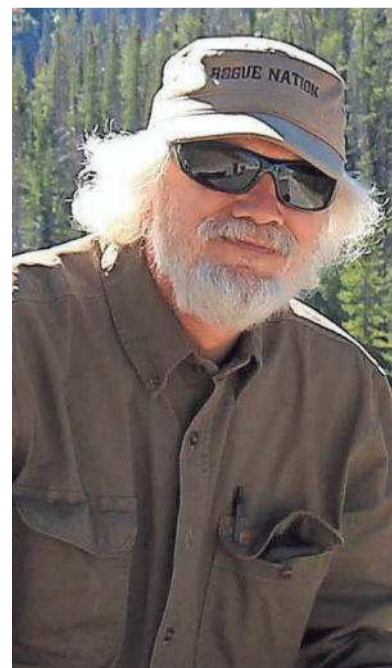
Lamb said Don Hiebert of Idanha, Henry's son, tried setting up a generator in the adjacent "wheel-house," years ago but it was unsuccessful.

"Perhaps because of the heavy-

duty components used; the generator was military, and a large gearbox was also involved," Lamb said. "After getting it running, I may attempt power generation for lighting, and electrifying a fence around the base, to keep onlookers from getting too close."

In the meantime, Lamb hopes to elicit enough interest to help him finance the quest. He set up a Go-Fund-Me account to help alleviate significant out-of-pocket costs, and when the project is complete, his hopes will turn toward seeing an artifact back to running order – sharing his newfound toy with canyon neighbors and visitors alike.

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