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Farm co-ops struggling to keep up in modern world

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

If you're at a Salem location of Applebee's Grill and Bar and order an entrée with a side of steamed broccoli, you may not realize how local that broccoli is.

It was probably grown on a farm in the Willamette Valley and flash-frozen at a processing facility 20 minutes away.

For years NORPAC has supplied vegetables to restaurants like Applebee's and grocery stores like Fred Meyer. The farmers who were part of NORPAC still grow those crops, but what is fading away is NORPAC's business model – the mid-sized group of farmers banding together as a co-op to grow, harvest and process foods.

NORPAC Foods Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy

protection last week and its imminent sale to privately-owned Oregon Potato Company is indicative of a shift to bigger co-ops and private ownership for agricultural concerns.

However, NORPAC's demise doesn't mean food processing in the Willamette Valley is suffering; farmers are producing a more diversified crop and employing more people than ever before.

The Co-op crash

The number of farm cooperatives has steadily declined since the 1950s.

Since 2014 nearly one-third of co-ops in the United States dissolved or went bankrupt, according to a July report from CoBank

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Despite filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, NORPAC Foods' processing plant in Stayton is still hiring new employees. BILL POEHLER | STATESMAN JOURNAL



Customers enjoy dinner at the Silver Grille in Silverton. VICTOR PANICHKUL/STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE PHOTOS

END OF AN ERA FOR SILVER GRILLE

Emily Teel
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The end of an era. Jeff and Naomi Nizlek have announced the impending closure of their Silverton restaurant, Silver Grille.

They shared the decision to the restaurant's Facebook page on August 19.

"We take the running of this establishment very seriously and have been blessed with wonderful friends and patrons who have made the effort so rewarding...We would like to thank so many people for the support and generosity and love that you have shown us for almost 20 years, please know it has been an agonizing decision to go and we will miss it so much because of you."

The restaurant, 206 East Main St., opened in December 1996. Meant to be the retirement project of chef Donna Mattson and co-owner Kim Reiersen, the couple sold it to Jeff Nizlek in 2000.

Nizlek, who grew up in Beaverton, studied culinary arts at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. He cooked at East Coast restaurants and abroad before returning to Oregon where he worked at Tony Demes' Couvron in Portland. When he saw the Silver Grille was for sale, he made the move out of a desire for a more rural life, a restaurant of his own to showcase ingredients grown and produced



Jeff Nizlek and his wife, Naomi, own the Silver Grille in Silverton. VICTOR PANICHKUL / STATESMAN JOURNAL

nearby.

"Having spent so much time in rural areas," said Nizlek, "I really missed that." Besides, he added, the agriculture in this area means working "here is a cook's dream."

With the exception of a few years in the late aughts, when Nizlek temporarily sold the restaurant to Joel Autryand instead cooked at The Bistro at Wellspring Medical Center, he has done just that.

Silver Grille offered an ambitious, seasonal and locally-driven menu a decade before farm-to-table

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New online school's principal leads by example

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Chris Long is trying to be an example that location isn't the most important factor when it comes to education.

The first principal hired for the new Willamette Connections Academy – an online public charter school which starts its first school year Sept. 3 – lives in Maple Valley, Washington, about 30 miles southeast of Seattle and 236 miles away from the school's office in Scio.

And she doesn't have plans to move to Oregon anytime soon.

"The great thing about working at an online environment is my work is local," she said. "Even on the



Chris Long

road, I have pulled off to the side of the road and had meetings when I'm travelling.

"Being able to model 21st century schools and being in that online environment and how we can interact and how we can work effectively is something that I model to my staff and model to our students as well."

Teachers and administrators at schools in Oregon must have teacher licenses in Oregon, but there is no requirement they live in the state. Long said she has completed the necessary paperwork for her license in Oregon

She said she anticipates making the trek to Oregon

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Marquis takes over operations of Marian Estates

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

One of Sublimity's largest employers is under new management.

Marquis Companies, a post-acute rehabilitation management company, took over operations of Marian Estates' 38-acre campus Aug. 1.

The company closed its Silverton location, Silver Gardens, and moved its staff and many of its patients to Sublimity last week.

Marian Marquis Estates administrator Jennifer Hoffer said after the move, Marian Estates has over 100 employees; Marquis employed 40 in Silverton.

The Sublimity location will offer assisted living, long-term care and memory care at the location on Church Street.

"I think the campus is a huge draw because we do have assisted living on our campus and independent living and memory care," Hoffer said.

"Whatever aging process they're in, we have a service that can prepare for that. We have a large facility here, so I feel like people who can't get into long-term care, we have that availability."

Marquis operated Silver Gardens at its location on James Street for 17 years until the Aug. 1 move.

Hoffer said Silver Gardens had 22 residents at the time of the move and once combined the new location in Sublimity housed 53.

Marian Estates has 214 licensed beds, Hoffer said, which will allow the company to care for a larger number of patients.

She said residents were given the option to move to the new location in Sublimity, which most did, but a few chose to be transferred to other facilities in Silverton.

"That's my hometown," Hoffer said. "I was born and raised there. It's very near and dear to me. I feel like we were able to grow to Marquis Marian Estates in Sublimity."

"I feel that even though it is not in Silverton, we are still able to help that community with their needs for long-term care and skilled care because it isn't that far away."

An order of nuns started Mother of Grace Home for the Aged in Sublimity in 1954 as a 54-bed nursing home.

Maurice Reece purchased it in 1975, changed the name to Marian Estates, expanded it to its current 38-acre campus and was CEO of the company until his death at age 72 in 2012.

His family still owns the facility, but Marquis is taking over the business operations.

Marquis Companies, which is based in Milwaukie, has 23 facilities in California, Nevada and Oregon, including locations in Portland, Forest Grove, Canby, Newberg, Klamath Falls, Springfield, Tualatin and Wilsonville.

Hoffer said Marquis is tentatively planning to have an open house at the campus to meet the new community.

"We've already had a lot of neighbors come by and peak in and just to meet the operators of Marquis Marian Estates," said Hoffer, who has worked for Marquis for 21 years.

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Management of Marian Estates in Sublimity has been taken over by Marquis Companies. BILL POEHLER | STATESMAN JOURNAL