

Tillamook's new visitor center to open in 2018

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

TILLAMOOK, Ore. — To more than 1.3 million visitors each year, the Tillamook Cheese factory, operated by the Tillamook County Creamery Association, has been more than just a production facility.

The Tillamook Cheese Factory became a must-see family attraction shortly after it was built in 1949.

This year, that attraction is growing to accommodate those visitors. The old visitors center at the Tillamook Cheese Factory will be torn down, and built in its place will be a new 38,500-square-foot facility. The new center is due for completion in the summer of 2018, but a temporary center is open across the parking lot from the factory.

The Tillamook Cheese Factory's first visitor accommodations were simple: restrooms, a small cheese store and guided tours, according to TCCA spokeswoman Tori Harms.

In 1968, the company built a special entrance and observation area where visitors could watch the cheesemaking process through windows.

The now-old visitors center was part of a 1979 expansion, and was remodeled several times in the following 38 years, adding a gift shop, a dining and kitchen area, an



Tillamook County Creamery Association

The new visitors center at the Tillamook Cheese Factory is due for completion in the summer of 2018.

enclosed patio for the atrium and a new upstairs observation deck.

In 2003, the center got another makeover — its last one.

The Tillamook Cheese Factory's visitors center is as big an attraction as the Space Needle in Seattle, says the association's CEO, Patrick Criteser. Tillamook is one of the Northwest's largest dairy cooperatives.

"This project represents a significant investment in our local presence here in Tillamook County and one that we anticipate will attract even more visitors to our area," said Criteser.

The new center will feature a larger café with indoor and outdoor seating and a new, cheesy menu including wood-fired pizza and local wine and beer; improved ice cream,

coffee and retail areas; enhanced viewing of the cheese making and packaging area; interactive exhibits; a small theater; a workspace where Tillamook staff can conduct focus groups to get feedback on new products; a private event room for small parties; and improved parking.

In the meantime, a small temporary visitors' center combines some features of the old and new: the smell of waffle cones greets visitors at the door, just as before. The sound of mooing cows and calves fills the main hall, where children push buttons to hear and see the variety of sounds a cow makes.

Visitors can check out — and play with — the latest

milking parlor equipment and tractors and can watch a video of the Seals family's dairy, a multi-generational operation in Tillamook County, or look at educational displays of farm life.

There's the popular line of cheese samples, just as in the old center. Racks of jams and jellies and local goodies, T-shirts, stuffed cows, coloring books and jewelry, fudges and candies fill the temporary gift shop.

From the refrigerators, visitors can still purchase Tillamook products — from cottage cheese to smoked cheddar. As before, they can buy a scoop (or two or three) of Tillamook's famous ice cream, packed into fresh waffle cones



Tillamook County Creamery Association

The new 38,500-square-foot visitors center will feature a larger café and a new, cheesy menu including wood-fired pizza.

or served in a dish.

Coffee, fancy or plain, with real Tillamook cream or not, is also available at the temporary center café.

The temporary center is open year-round from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. June through Labor Day and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. after Labor Day.

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