

People & Places

Going with mass timber

Russ Vaagen
starting new
company producing
mass timber

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

COLVILLE, Wash. — Russ Vaagen, whose family has a 66-year history in Washington state’s timber industry, sees a future in mass timber.

The former president of family-owned Vaagen Brothers Lumber has founded a new company, Vaagen Timbers, which will produce mass timber products.

Mass timber, also called engineered wood, includes cross laminated timber, glulam beams and other products that are less expensive, lighter and just as strong as other building materials such as steel and concrete.

Cross laminated timber is made by gluing planks of wood in perpendicular layers, creating thick panels that can be used for walls and floors.

He sees the use of wood in homes, apartments and buildings as a way to remind urban and suburban consumers about the importance of the rural timber industry.

“These products allow us to tell a story so the consumer really understands and makes that connection: ‘I’m living in this apartment and it’s made



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Vaagen Timbers founder and CEO Russ Vaagen talks about his new company’s approach and connecting forest management with market needs Sept. 4 in Colville, Wash.

of wood and it ... supports healthy forests and healthy communities,” Vaagen said.

He foresees the timber going into mid-rise apartments and commercial structures ranging from 4 to 10 stories.

Vaagen expects to use roughly 30 million board-feet of timber per year at first, with room for growth.

He points to more developers building all-wood projects, supporting local jobs and economies.

Because mass timber uses smaller logs, it benefits inland forests where restoration is needed, thinning the small trees in the dense under story

and leaving the biggest and best trees more fire resistant, Vaagen said.

He also is adamant about helping rural economies in timber country.

“We want to see the value that’s coming from the forest get added as close to the forest as possible,” Vaagen said.

Vaagen is the president of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition on the Colville National Forest. He emphasizes timber sales to mills as a tool for forest restoration, used to pay for needed thinning.

Vaagen said he tries to match forest needs with com-

munity needs for the greatest good.

Mass timber has been used in Europe for decades but is relatively new to the U.S. industry, said Adam Molenda, president of the Timber Product Manufacturers Association.

Vaagen is on the association’s board of directors.

“It’s very structurally sound, it’s very fire-resistant,” Molenda said. “There’s opportunities to build skyscrapers, new buildings. We hope that the industry would see the value and help manage the forest a little better.”

James Krejci is a commer-



Western
Innovator

Russ Vaagen

Title: Founder and CEO, Vaagen Timbers; former president of Vaagen Brothers Lumber.

Age: 41

Hometown: Colville, Wash.

Education: Degrees in management and human resource management from Washington State University.

Family: Engaged, two children, expecting a baby in November

Website: <https://www.vaagentimbers.com/>
<http://www.theforestblog.com/>

cial banker at Umpqua Bank and has worked with Vaagen.

“He’s done a lot of work educating the general public on proper management techniques and initiatives, with the goal of minimizing wildfire impacts and leaving healthier forests,” Krejci said. “He’s done that while creating a business model that supports those techniques and initiatives.”

OSU, retailer collaborate on provolone

By ALIYA HALL
For the Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — For Christie Alexandre-Zeoli, who is in charge of cheese purchasing at Market of Choice, the collaboration between Oregon State University and the high-end regional grocery chain “scratches every itch.”

The collaboration involves utilizing the cheese created in the OSU dairy program to teaching the store’s cheese stewards how the cheese is made.

“I really feel like land grant universities with these programs have so much to give retail organizations,” she said. “There is so much knowledge and talent available.”

Although stewards understand what they are looking for with the cheese, Alexandre-Zeoli said it’s completely different when making it, and she wanted to provide them with firsthand experience.

A cheesemaker herself — formerly involved with Washington State University’s Cougar Gold cheese — she said it’s a connection between the head and the heart.

“The head knows it’s a great cheese, but the cheesemaker has a different depth about what it takes,” she said. “The sweat and cleaning, the science and technology, as well as the artisan knowledge. This collaboration not only educates my stewards to be the best cheese



Steve Smith Photography

Market of Choice cheese stewards and Oregon State University students worked together to create Beaver Classic Provolone cheese.

retailers in the state of Oregon, it also teaches them what it means to make cheese.”

Alexandre-Zeoli said she has known Robin Frojen, the OSU food pilot plant and creamery manager, for years, and has watched her bring Beaver Classic cheese back to the forefront. Through their partnership, Beaver Classic Provolone was born.

“This cheese that Robin has created is a traditional style provolone aged for three months,” she said. “Provolone in this country — in my opinion — has become, and has been in the past, a highly processed standardized product, one that has not showcased traditional provolone the way it’s made in Italy. Robin was inspired to make it an Old World-style aged provolone.”

Alexandre-Zeoli said it’s a

snacking and ingredient cheese that is creamy, with a butter flavor and a little “funk.” She’s often asked about the choice of provolone, and she said that everyday cheeses “deserve as much exposure and appreciation as a triple-creme brie.”

The process starts with getting the milk from the OSU dairy herd. The students pasteurize, culture and ferment it until it coagulates. The curds are cut and cooked for a specific time and a set temperature and acidity. A special aspect to this provolone: Instead of the curds being manually stretched, it goes through a cheddaring process that does it for them.

The specialty cheese is available at Market of Choice for \$16.99 a pound, a standard price for most of the Beaver Classic cheeses.

“We’re not an affordable

cheese, but we have no business being affordable,” Frojen said. “It’s an excess agricultural commodity as a result of education. We’re not making to production needs. We’re teaching students how to make cheese and run a processing plant.”

She said the job is 90 percent cleaning and 10 percent glory.

“The excitement is the passion,” she said. “A lot of people end up being stewards because they took a job at the grocery store, then they catch the passion. Watching them interact with my students is amazing. The learning on both sides is critical.”

The creamery has been part of the university since the beginning but in the 1950s it was shut down out of concerns it would compete with the private dairy sector. It reopened in

2010 with a donation, and came out with its first cheese in 2012.

At the time, the cheese was called Beaver Classic, but over the years that has expanded to be the brand. Now, they have eight lines of cheeses, from classics such as original cheddar and Swiss to Pinot-, cider- and porter-soaked cheddars.

The milk comes from the dairy herd of around 125 cows, and the program has 20 students.

“We could not be more excited about this opportunity,” Lyn Ryse, Market of Choice vice president of marketing, said. “I don’t know of any other retailer in Oregon, or anywhere in the country, that’s doing anything like this. There’s really nothing more rewarding than actually making the cheese, bringing it into our stores and offering it to people who will take it home and enjoy it, then have them come back and tell us how much they loved it. It really is satisfying.”

Beaver Classic provolone is sold exclusively at the 11 Market of Choice stores in Oregon.

“For Christie and me, the reason we match so well is the passion that this means to us,” Frojen said. “This is what students and stewards are catching and that surpasses anything else. I encourage people to eat and think outside the box. Do something that scares you, eat something that scares you. That’s how they’ll find if this is for them.”

Oregon FFA, Les Schwab work together to ‘Drive Away Hunger’

Les Schwab Tire Centers of Oregon has partnered with Oregon FFA in a “Drive Away Hunger” Initiative to help raise as much food as possible for those in need.

The initiative will take place during October.

Many Oregonians today are suffering from food insecurity

and worry about where their next meal may come from. Since 2008, the Oregon Food Bank has seen the demand for emergency food boxes increase by 44 percent. During October, while the Drive Away Hunger Initiative is happening you may see FFA members across the state doing a variety

of service activities to raise as much food and funds as possible. Be on the lookout for activities and collections happening throughout your community.

You are encouraged to drop food donations at any Les Schwab Tire Center, Wilco Farm Store, Grange Co-op

Store or your local FFA chapter. Collection bags are being distributed to subscribers of the Capital Press, East Oregonian, Wallowa County Chieftain, Hermiston Herald, and Blue Mountain Eagle newspaper, or you may pick up a collection bag at your local Les Schwab Tire Center, Wilco Farm Store

or Grange Co-op Store.

In addition to nonperishable food, the FFA is seeking farm and ranch crop donations. If you would be willing to donate a portion of your food crop, please contact your local FFA chapter or Christa Towery with the Oregon FFA Foundation, at ctowery@oregonffa.com.

Calendar

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at www.capitalpress.com and click on “Submit an Event.” Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301 or emailed to newsroom@capitalpress.com. Include “Calendar” in the subject line.

Saturday, Oct. 6

Oregon’s Bounty. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Oregon State Capitol, 900 Court St. NE, Salem, Ore. This event focuses on the importance of agriculture in the state and brings a little bit of the farm to

the front steps of the Capitol. Website: <https://bit.ly/2QmtO9m>

Thursday, Oct. 11

Intro to Pasture Management. 5:30-7 p.m. OSU SOREC Extension Building Auditorium, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Through understanding the biology of pasture plants and grazing behavior or livestock, you can improve the productivity of your pasture and reduce weed problems. In this introductory course, you will learn to identify important forage species, evaluate soil fertility needs, and implement rotational-grazing management

techniques to maintain productive pastures in southern Oregon. Gordon Jones, professor at the OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center, will offer this class. For information: lee.s@oregonstate.edu or 541-776-7371 Cost: \$15 Website: <http://bit.ly/JacksonExtAgriculture>

Friday-Sunday
Oct. 12-14

Hood River Valley Harvest Fest. 1-6 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Hood River Event Site, North of Exit 63 off Interstate 84, Hood River, Ore. Celebrate

Hood River’s harvest season. This old-fashioned fall festival brings together more than 120 vendors offering local produce and food products, plus arts and crafts, wine, cider and beer tastings. Held along the scenic Hood River waterfront, this is the Columbia River Gorge’s biggest celebration of the region’s incredible fall bounty. Website: <http://hoodriver.org/harvest-fest/>

Thursday, Oct. 18

Balancing Profitability and Access in Local Food Systems. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. The Riverside Hotel, 2900 W. Chinden Blvd., Boise, Idaho. In a state that comprises big ag, small ag and

highly motivated food system stakeholders, how can we bring more locally produced foods into mainstream markets and strengthen the economics of small- to mid-sized farms? This one-day conference will explore, through an economic lens, ways to cultivate a local food economy to create jobs, invigorate small farms and businesses and keep precious dollars in our Idaho communities. Hosted by the University of Idaho Extension, the conference is made possible with a Western Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (WSARE) grant. Cost: \$45 Website: <https://idahofood2018.eventbrite.com>

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