

Birkenfeld Store and Café *continued from front page*

and said, 'Did you see the store is for sale?' and one thing led to another," said Mike, when asked how a former phone company lineman ended up as the proprietor of a country store.

Mike is originally from San Di-



The deck at the Birkenfeld Store and Café.

ego and is retired from Northwest Bell/Quest. He currently runs the day-to-day operations of the store while Wendy is getting ready to retire this year and join him. Mike had lived and worked in Eastern Oregon outside of Hepner for about twenty years before finding his way to Birkenfeld. Wendy grew up in the Vernonia/Jewell area.

"Jack had started to dabble in the restaurant end of things when we took over," explained Mike about how Birky's has changed since he and Wendy took over. "He had more of a deli. And we saw the potential for it to be more than just that, so we turned it into a café-- put in the grill, changed some things around and then started adding to the deck. We started decorating because Jack was kind of funny that way-- he didn't like a lot of stuff on the walls. Of course, we're country folks, so it has a nice country feel. We've tried to keep some of the character of the store without changing too much."

The Ingrahams have expanded the café space and cut back on the store space, giving them more versatility with what they can do. "We're trying to develop some different facets that can be changed at a moment's notice," says Mike. "We're going to do a wedding this summer and we've been approached about doing private parties out on the deck, and we can do some catering out

of the café."

The café has been successful serving breakfasts and lunches and features hand-pressed burgers, hand-sliced meats for their sandwiches and real milkshakes as well as a nice selection of northwest beers and wines.

"We've tried to make the area a destination and create an atmosphere here, offering good quality foods," says Mike. "You have to be able to change. And of course, this year we've branched out into the music and started bringing bands in."

That live music on weekends has been an added feature that has grown in popularity, from just a handful of people to a packed room on some nights. Birky's can seat about fifty people comfortably and still leave room for a band and a small dance floor. "Lock, Stock and Barrel" have become regular favorites and Birky's has brought in a nice mix of other performers. "The music sounds good in this old building," says Mike. "It has a nice tone and the bottles on the shelf don't rattle," laughs Mike.

Mike says he's encouraged that more small local establishments in the Vernonia area are taking the risk and providing live entertainment. "People out here like to have live performances, but they need to know it's risky for the owners to pay someone to come out and perform," he says. "People need to remember that if they want these kinds of things, they need to support them."



Two members of "Lock Stock and Barrel" performing an acoustic music set.

Being in such a remote area offers the expected challenges-- business is slower in winter, and generally has a smaller base of customers to pull from, but there are also positives. "With the logging industry having its challenges, those become our challenges too," says Mike. "We're all neighbors out here, we all work and play together and the economy is just tough right now. The locals want to support us and they do as much as they can. We feel fortunate that we're in an area where all our customers know us and we know all of them by name."

Summers bring a whole new perspective with motorcyclists, people on their way to the beach, other travelers and road trippers and visitors to Fishhawk Lake-- which is just down the road. "We get people out here from all over," says Mike. "We've had people



stop in from Germany, Australia, Japan... You never know who you're going to run into out here."

Mike has also gotten involved in a few side projects in the summer months. The Ingraham's have a large piece of private property a few miles down the road where they have played



host to "Run 21," a large gathering of motorcyclists that is organized by the Southeast Chapter of A.B.A.T.E. That event includes national name musical acts. Mike and Wendy also organized the "Birkenfeld Blues Revue and Festival" last Labor Day weekend. They are planning to organize that music event again this year, which is a fundraiser to help local timber workers and their families and last year brought in performers through the Cascade Blues Association.

Mike says he appreciates the support his business has gotten from around the region, especially from Vernonia-area businesses. "Everyone around here tries to help each other out and I really appreciate what we all do for each other."

The old Birkenfeld Store and Cafe continues to survive and find ways to reinvent itself. Whether you're in the area for lunch, live music, or just picking up supplies for the weekend, you will always be welcome at Birky's.

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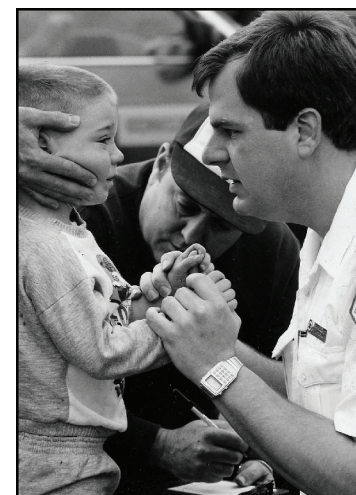
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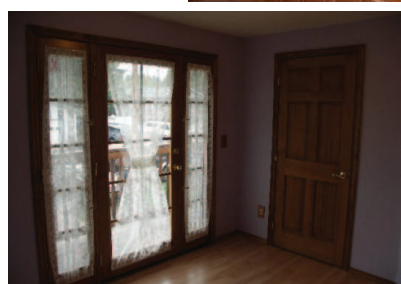
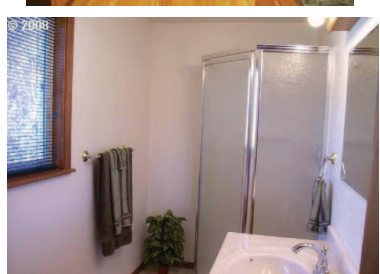
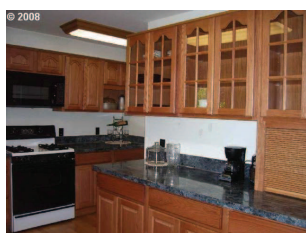
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