

## GORGE LOCAL — IN BUSINESS

# Landmark changes hands

**Maccabees purchase Horsefeathers, Orzecks look back on 32 years in business**

■ By Kirby Neumann-Rea  
Columbia Gorge News

An iconic downtown Hood River building has changed hands.

Dr. Mendy Maccabee and her husband, Dr. David Maccabee, have purchased the former Big Horse Brewery/Horsefeathers building from Randy and Susan Orzeck.

Mendy Maccabee said current plans are to turn the long-time restaurant into housing. Because of challenges meeting city requirements, the Maccabees will not use the building for their clinic, as they had originally planned.

The Orzecks transformed the building into a successful restaurant and later brewery for 32 years before fire closed it in May 2019.

"It's been our life. I can only imagine we've employed 600-800 people over the years, and so many of them remain our friends," Susan said.

"The coolest thing is anywhere I go on this planet, anyone you mention to you're from Hood River, they think of this building," Randy said.

The Orzecks, who now live in White Salmon, decided to sell in September 2020, retiring early and abandoning their plans to reopen the restaurant, after a year of negotiations with their insurance company and the City of Hood River. After the fire, the Orzecks figured on six-eight months before finishing repairs and upgrades needed to reopen. Insurance haggling and unexpected requirements by the city meant delays and cost increases. And then the coronavirus happened.

"It was another challenge

in a stream of challenges," Susan said, Randy adding, "Starting or rebuilding at this time? It was a huge financial and emotional challenge."

The aftermath of the Horsefeathers fire was as traumatic as the fire itself, between protracted discussions with the insurance company over a damage settlement (concluded in November 2020) and the challenges of working with the city on how to redevelop the building, which proved costlier and more complex than the Orzecks felt was worth pursuing.

While acknowledging the obstacles they faced on insurance and municipal fronts for the 16 after the fire, the Orzecks said they choose to look at the positives of the time Big Horse/Horsefeathers was an anchor business downtown.

"You can't control what happens in life as much as you'd like to. The fire was traumatic," Randy said. "The whole thing was rough, but in the end, the way I look at it is there is no point in looking back. We are where we are, and we're done."

"And it feels great," Susan said.

What started as mid-scale bistro dining restaurant transformed into a brew pub with live music, shelves filled with books, a couple of screens for watching sports, and a casual atmosphere with an awesome view. Randy recalled the early days in 1988 when downtown was dead, and standing at the window watching headlights turn onto Second Street from the Interstate, and hoping that car might be headed to the restaurant to eat.

After the fire the Orzecks started improvements in early 2020 with the idea of turning the patio area into an outdoor-only dining area, but those plans ran into complications as well. The patio — abutting the popular Second Street stairs and overlooking Stratton Park — had long been a gathering place and a



Randy and Susan Orzeck, at top, stand where the Horsefeathers Bar used to be in a September 2020 photo. The interior was gutted following the May 2019 fire and the restaurateurs decided to abandon efforts to redevelop the property and sell the building. Crews worked on the roof, at right, and added a new second-story deck. Kirby Neumann-Rea photos

wedding and event venue.

"It was a real homey type of environment where people could come and celebrate," Susan said.

Asked when the restaurant hit its stride after the sparse first few years, Randy said, "The year we put in the brewery," 1994. After Full Sail, it was the second one in Hood River County. Justa Pasta had occupied the ground-floor space before the Orzecks added the brewery. (Randy was the first brewer)

"We had some people who were kind of mad, they'd say, 'You went from fine dining and now you're going to be a brewery?'"

He said, "Our sales tripled that year, and that's when we were on a financial level where we actually had a savings account. That changed everything. Everything that

happened in town after that was a benefit to us."

The neighboring Overlook Memorial Park and its waterfall came next, later Stratton Park, "and things got more glorious," Susan said.

"The public amenities we've benefited from, and maybe added to, became a symbiosis," Randy said.

Maccabee credited the Orzecks with plenty of helpful guidance in the specific interior details of renovating a space that had to be gutted following the 2019 fire.

In turn, Maccabee wants to preserve the spirit of the building that had been a restaurant and brewery for more than 30 years.

Maccabee wants to honor the history of the building, and the place the Orzecks created, by keeping the exterior unchanged, keeping the



Big Horse sign on the north side of the building, and adding signage that invokes that of the restaurant.

"We are super-happy to leave it as an iconic structure in tribute to the history of the building, and the footprint it left on downtown," Maccabee said.

A "Closed for Remodeling"

sign hung for months after the fire and, while the building was dark and absent of activity as the Orzecks strove to re-open, the remodeling is now happening, starting with repairs to the stairway, and replacement of the upper-story deck facing north and overlooking downtown and the Columbia River.



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