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Shari's Closes All Oregon Locations

Oregon-based chain was down to 17 restaurants after starting this year with 42.

Shari's Cafe & Pies, once the largest family dining chain in the Pacific Northwest, has closed all of its remaining locations.

Founded in Hermiston in 1978 by Ron and Sharon "Shari" Bergquist. The Company made several poor business decisions prior to the pandemic and never fully recovered. The casual dining establishment became the subject of tax liens, lawsuits and eviction notices, according to independent contractors owed tens of thousands by Shari's.

Throughout 2024, many Shari's locations closed with little or no warning. Yakima, Keizer, Tacoma, Boise, Lewiston all closed, fueling rumors of the impending end of an Oregon institution. Last month, a company-wide "pie-shortage" was reported in the press. When news broke Oct. 21, Shari's was down to 17 Oregon locations after starting the year with 42.

"I can confirm at this time that all Oregon Shari's are closed," Samuel Borgese, founder of Shari's parent company, Gather Holdings, is quoted by Willamette Week. But it was the Oregon Lottery that first confirmed Oregon's 17 remaining Shari's had closed. The agency's director, Mike Wells, sent an all-staff email confirming the closure after seeing rumors on social media. The Oregonian reached staff members in California, Idaho and Washington who said locations in those states were still open on the evening of Oct. 21. Wells was in a position to know because the agency drew a large chunk of revenue from the restaurant's video poker terminals — \$7.45 million in 2023. Earlier this year, Shari's bank account with the state lottery went dry and the state shut down its access to gambling until a bond was paid. OPB reported that as of this week, Shari's owed the Oregon Lottery \$900,000.

Shari's served what it called "fresh Northwest comfort food," notably, specialty pies like chocolate cream Supreme and marionberry cheese. Most locations featured a six-sided building design and were open 24 hours. At the time it was sold to Fairmount Capital near the turn of the millennium, Shari's operated 97 locations in seven Western states with around 4,000 employees.

In 2018, Oregon Business featured Shari's in "The Non-Foodie Restaurant Survival Guide," a feature about unpretentious casual restaurants working to stay afloat amid a "restaurant apocalypse" that shuttered locations of fast food and fast-casual restaurants that were once household names, like Applebee's and Subway. Borgese, identified in that story as the new CEO of Shari's, which at that time had 90 locations in six states, said he had recently overseen a menu refresh and rebrand, both focused on the chain's Northwest roots.

"I think the company strayed away from it for a number of years and, therefore, may have lost some of its loyal customer base that liked the fact that it was a Northwest brand," Borgese told OB in 2018. "I've embraced that, and we're seeing a good response." He also stressed that while the restaurant was seeking to bring in younger customers, he would not chase millennial customers with "gimmicky" tactics.

Ron Bergquist was a Hermiston architect with a vision for a 24-hour diner with a hexagonal layout (the design was intended to maximize window space while minimizing the distance between diners and the kitchen, according to the Oregon Historical Society). Shari herself developed a menu rich with traditional comfort food like country-fried steak and pie. The chain spread first to Sherwood and Newberg. When the Bergquists sold to corporate owners in 1985, the chain stood at 33 locations and annual sales of \$30 million.

Larry Curtis is credited with providing stable leadership as president from 1984 to 2008, when he was succeeded by former Black Angus CEO Bruce MacDiarmid. The company was sold several times to restaurant consortiums over the next decade. In 2018, the brand acquired struggling California sister chains Coco's and Carrows, with a combined 60 locations, in a deal that was never announced to the public.

"Shari's was an Oregon institution, and a longtime Lottery retailer," Wells wrote in his email to Oregon Lottery staff. "With the closure of all restaurants, the financial risks in continuing to partner are simply too great."

25 Million in Federal Funding for Port of Coos Bay Intermodal Project

WASHINGTON, DC – On October 16, 2024, U.S. Representative Val Hoyle and U.S. Senator Ron Wyden and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley, announced \$25,018,750 in federal funding for the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port (PCIP) Terminal Planning Project. The investment comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highways Projects (INFRA) grant program.

"I am thrilled today that the U.S. Department of Transportation has awarded over \$25 million for the Port of Coos Bay Intermodal Project," said U.S. Representative Val Hoyle. "This project has the potential to bring over 8000 jobs to Southwest Oregon's coastal communities and to strengthen our nation's supply chain. Today's announcement brings us one step closer to rebuilding the South Coast as an economic engine for the state and introduces more pathways to the middle class." She added, "I would like to thank Secretary Buttigieg, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the White House, and my partners in Congress for their support and persistence to help bring this project closer to fruition."

"Today's \$25 million announcement takes a significant step forward to landing this Port of Coos Bay project that will ultimately generate thousands of good-paying jobs on the South Coast and extend huge economic and environmental benefits throughout Oregon," said U.S. Senator Ron Wyden. "There's still more work to be done, and I am committed to keep pressing the case along with Congresswoman Hoyle and Senator Merkley to provide all the federal investment

this project has earned and fully deserves."

"This \$25 million federal investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a historic win for Oregon's rural South Coast and our entire state and is the kickstart that Coos Bay's transformative container port project needs. This project will create thousands of good-paying union and permanent local jobs, boost the economy, and help address bottlenecks in the national supply chain, while cutting greenhouse gas emissions," said U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley. "I have long championed this critical project alongside Representative Hoyle, Senator Wyden, Port leadership, and a diverse community of stakeholders, and together we advocated to the highest levels of the Biden administration to ensure this federal commitment. Today's win moves the Port of Coos Bay forward toward the vision of becoming the first fully ship-to-rail port facility on the West Coast and is a testament to the power of collaboration and never giving up—the Oregon Way."

In addition to creating thousands of jobs in a rural area that has been too often overlooked, the PCIP project will benefit the nation's supply chain by easing congestion at West Coast Ports. It will also be the nation's first ship-to-rail port on the West Coast, meaning the facility will not need to rely on trucks to move cargo. The project is also anticipated to use renewable energy sources to provide green electricity, which will allow for the use of electric-powered cargo handling equipment, vehicle charging, and onshore power. The Port will be fitted with electric power plugs to power ships at berth (known as "cold ironing") during the process of unloading."

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