

“If you are driven to be as good a parent as you can be, come here,” Graham says of the Oregon adoption process.

In the second half of 2014, two events occurred that would change the course of Graham’s life. He lost his job during Microsoft’s mass layoff of 18,000 employees and his marriage ended, amicably. Graham and his ex-husband now share custody.

In his former married and family life, Graham says, “I didn’t step foot in downtown. I had no idea what was going on in this town. It wasn’t until I was single that I really knew there was no gay bar here.”

And thus Graham, who wasn’t fond of queer dating and hook-up apps like Grindr and Scruff, embraced a new mantra: “Gay taphouse.”

“So I’m at Studio One [Cafe] with my cousin,” he recalls, laughing. “She comes back from the bathroom and tosses *Eugene Weekly* on the table and it’s that cover article.” The article “Home: The LGBT community needs a space to call its own” came out Nov. 26.

Graham then tracked down John O’Malley, mentioned in the article as founder of the monthly LGBTQA happy hour event, Made in the U.S.A, at The Barn Light.

“I read what John had to say and found that we shared a lot of the same culture shock,” Graham says. “What we were both used to, it was very different in Eugene. I was like, I need to talk to this guy and maybe there’s a meeting of the minds.”

By March, Graham had convinced O’Malley to join the venture as the venue’s events producer and marketing director.

MEET THE LAMB AND THE WOLF

Initially, Graham was looking to open a 6,000-square-foot event space, but O’Malley steered him away from that concept to something more manageable and affordable, like a pub. Graham, who is financing the The Hammered Lamb, didn’t want to go into debt. “I wanted to do it without borrowing and let that decide everything,” he says.

After months of looking for a location and lining up permits, a liquor license, insurance and vendors, Graham says he and O’Malley have finally arrived at the “fun stuff.”

Pasquerelli Construction, the builders who worked on other downtown spots The Barn Light and Sizzle Pie, began remodeling the interior in April, leaving behind no remnants of its former tenant, Lord Leebrick Theatre Company, which housed its administrative offices there from 2009 to 2012. The space has been vacant since.

“The interior design is essentially finalized,” O’Malley says. Sitting next to Graham in a bar downtown, he unrolls some tentative designs by GMA Architects — the same firm that designed the interior of Tacovore in the Whiteaker neighborhood. “It’s going to be big and cozy at the same time.”

O’Malley points on the paper to a row of windows on Broadway. They are replacing the permanently shut glass panes with windows that open to the street, where there will be sidewalk seating for the pub, serving lunch, dinner and general pub fare throughout the day, seven days a week.

Both the pub and The Den will have a bar, and while the two spaces are connected, they will also have separate entrances, one to the pub on Broadway and an alley entrance to The Den.

“We want it really to have a multipurpose quality to it that doesn’t just exist on a nightlife identity,” O’Malley says. Patrons “can be in the front cozy pub or they can go back to The Den, where it’s dark and more exciting and more modern.”

Touring the 2,770-square-foot site later that day, Graham and O’Malley describe how the front bar will divide the space horizontally, parallel to the street. In the back half of the space, O’Malley points to the dressing-room area, which will be next to the DJ booth, envisioned as a window framed in lights overlooking the event space.

“We are anticipating doing some really fun neon work in the space in a really exciting and modern way,” O’Malley says. The event space will also be available to rent out.

Graham and O’Malley have tapped Brianna Bulski of Little Arrow, a Eugene design studio, to do the branding for the space. The brand identity for The Hammered Lamb will be, you guessed it, a lamb, and a wolf for The Den — a playful nod to one of Aesop’s fables.

CITY OF DREAMS

Early on in the planning, Graham and O’Malley reached out to the city.

“I started doing research and I found out that Eugene has a really great human rights initiative through the city,” O’Malley says. “I thought it would be a great start, especially because we’re working with the queer community.”

O’Malley contacted Michael Kinnison, the program manager for the city of Eugene’s Office of Human Rights & Neighborhood Involvement, who in turn brought in Nan Laurence, a senior planner for the city with a focus on developing downtown. The four of them met in April to discuss the new venture.

Laurence wanted them to know they had a buddy downtown to ease them through the process, whether that be guidance in acquiring an OLCC license or applying for the city’s downtown loan fund.

“When you think about a high-functioning, attractive, economically sustainable downtown, all these pieces have to work together,” Laurence says of all the new businesses convening in the urban core. “I think The Hammered Lamb is bringing in a central piece.”

Laurence explains that downtown should be for everyone. “The LGBT focus really speaks to inclusion,” she says. The city’s “overall goal is to have everyone come downtown on a regular basis. What’s not to love?”

The new venue, she says, will also draw students downtown, helping bridge the town-and-gown divide.



Graham and O’Malley also met with Mayor Kitty Piercy and consulted with Sgt. Larry Crompton of the Eugene Police Department, who gave them pointers for The Hammered Lamb’s security system.

“One of the things I learned with nightlife in New York is that the best approach to running a successful nightclub is to be as transparent with the city as possible,” says O’Malley, who moved to Eugene from New York last summer. “If you open a dialogue with them and you create an experience where they know they can come to you and you can go to them, that creates a safe environment.”

Graham nods in agreement. Later he adds, “I would love to write something about my process for starting this business up just simply to highlight Eugene as an exemplary place to get what you need if you’re going it alone and you want to start a business.”

It’s not only the city offering guidance. “It’s nothing but a big collaboration of business down here,” Graham says. “All we’re getting is support.”

Oregon Contemporary Theatre (formerly Lord Leebrick Theatre Company) sits on the same block as The Hammered Lamb, a block whose storefronts have been slow to fill. OCT artistic director Craig Willis writes in an email to *EW* that he is glad to see another empty space

occupied and looks forward to mutually supportive relationships with neighbors.

Tobi Sovak, owner of Noisette Pastry Kitchen — a block west of The Hammered Lamb location — says she’s thrilled more business is coming to that stretch of downtown.

“At first when I heard it was a bar, I was like, ‘We don’t need another bar,’” Sovak says. “But when I heard it was a gay bar, I was like ‘Yeah, we need one!’ We need more diversity downtown.”

SAFE SPACES

Graham, 46, never came out. “I was never in,” he says. “I’m very fortunate with my family. I never for one moment in my childhood faced any kind of oppression or even a suggestion that being gay had negative connotations.” He adds, “That’s why it was so shocking when I did finally experience it.”

Growing up in L.A., the first exposure Graham had to homophobia was through television and film. It wasn’t until he was in his mid-20s and living in San Francisco that he experienced it firsthand, changing his outlook forever.

“It was actually quite a gay part of town,” Graham recalls. He compares it to the scene in *Boogie Nights* when Mark Wahlberg’s character is jumped by a group of guys in a parking lot. “It was that kind of truckload of guys that were chasing my partner and me. All of a sudden we heard screeching of the tires and we didn’t hear a word — we just heard the tires and we knew. We *knew*.”

They ran and managed to escape by turning down a one-way street. “That was the closest I’d ever came, and that was the first time I ever felt like San Francisco was even a scary place to walk down the street holding a partner’s hand,” he says. “From that point on, I’ve been careful.”

O’Malley, 31, who grew up in Washington, D.C., came out at 16.

“My family was 100-percent accepting,” he says. “My sister is queer identifying and my parents are amazing. They have never once not supported me.”

O’Malley too has personally experienced homophobia and hate speech in Eugene, in D.C. and even recalls a confrontation in the birthplace of the gay rights movement — New York’s Greenwich Village.

“That, right there, is the core of why safe spaces are important,” O’Malley says. “You can walk in and feel without a doubt that you will be comfortable.”

“And if you’re feeling uncomfortable, you will tell me or tell someone who works there and they will do something about it and they will fix,” Graham says of his establishment. “The reason day one I was like, ‘I wish there was a gay bar’ is because I wish there was a place I knew I could walk into and I could be completely at ease that if I wanted to interact with somebody that I didn’t know, or flirt maybe, that I can do that reasonably without fear of putting myself in danger.”

OUR COMMUNITY

In anticipation of The Hammered Lamb opening in August, O’Malley is planning a series of pop-up events including one to crowdsource what local brews to put on tap at the bar.

“I want this community to tell me what to serve,” Graham says.

O’Malley has also organized a photo campaign, “Our Community,” which will feature portraits of the local queer community as well as straight allies, including images of Graham’s family, which will eventually hang in the space. “No matter what sexuality you are, you will enjoy this space,” O’Malley says.

Graham admits that he can’t help but think of legacy and wanting his family to enjoy The Hammered Lamb over the years.

“I’ve got kids,” Graham says. “For me, I’m trying to create my future here with what to me is an amazing business opportunity. It is staring me in the face. How can I not take it?”

For more information and event updates, visit hammeredlambeugene.com.