

# Ace Hardware buys Dennis Co., a peninsula staple

## Kansas-based Ace subsidiary will keep Dennis name, staff, product lines

EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Dennis Co. has been sold to a Kansas-based subsidiary of the Ace Hardware Corp. in a transaction that will become final in March.

Run by the Dennis family since 1905, the local company owns five stores in Long Beach, Raymond, Aberdeen, Montesano and Elma. In recent years, it has been operated by brothers Brent and Randy Dennis, while their father, Gary, led the firm in the latter part of the 20th century.

Brent Dennis said the sale is close to a best-case scenario for the company's 85 employees and thousands of customers, who will see continuity in local management, product lines and community engagement. Even the name will remain nearly the same, with only the addition of "Ace" to mark a closer affiliation with the giant supplier, from which Dennis Co. already obtains much of its merchandise.

The purchaser is technically Westlake Ace Hardware, based in Lenexa, Kansas, with stores also located in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. In 2012, Westlake was acquired by Ace Retail Holdings, which in turn is a division of Ace Hardware Corp. The Dennis Co. stores will be Westlake's first locations on the West Coast.



Matt Winters/EO Media Group

Dennis Co., which has five branches including this one in Long Beach, has been sold to a Kansas-based company.

The sales price has not been disclosed. Dennis said his family will continue to own all the real estate associated with the five stores, leasing it to Westlake.

### A good fit

"Westlake's basic core values align right with ours and they were very interested in us," Dennis said regarding the process of finding a suitable purchaser for his company. "They are down-to-earth great people with strong ethics."

Word of a sale had been cir-

culating in Pacific County for several months, after the Dennises concluded the next generation of family members wasn't interested in active involvement in retail sales on the coast. Both Brent and Randy Dennis are of retirement age. Their four children — two for each brother — are pursuing other interests and succession planning necessitated finding a buyer.

Discussions with Westlake, which coincidentally was also founded in 1905, reassured the Dennis family that Westlake recognizes the strengths of the

local firm.

"Dennis Co. is being treated differently than most of their acquisitions," Dennis said. In part because of geographical distance from Kansas and different seasonal patterns between here and the Midwest, Westlake is leaving Dennis Co.'s internal systems intact, with the expectation that the Washington state stores will continue to purchase and sell a variety of unique product lines. Westlake will serve Dennis Co.'s existing charge accounts, and will be adding a rewards program.

Employees will remain in their current positions, and Westlake provides "great benefits," Dennis said.

The Dennis family has played key roles in Pacific County. For example they led the revival of the Long Beach Razor Clam Festival and host the annual Shop With A Cop events at Christmas-time. Dennis said he expects all that to continue under Westlake.

"We are excited to welcome the Dennis Co. into the Westlake family, expand our relationship within the communities they serve and continue their proud tradition of outstanding customer service," Westlake president and CEO Joe Jeffries said in a press release.

On its website, Westlake said without reference to this specific acquisition that "While the merchandise may have changed, along with store locations and size, the commitment to be the best neighborhood hardware store in the market remains. This commitment is what has kept Westlake strong for its first century of service — and will keep us growing into our next century."

Brent and Randy Dennis both plan to retire. Brent Dennis' children — a teacher and an accountant — live out of state and he eventually expects to live near one of them. In the meantime, he is maintaining community activities such as a volunteer position with

the Red Cross. Randy Dennis recently remarried and now lives in Clatsop County.

### End of an era

Dennis Co. marked its centennial in business in 2005.

The Raymond-based company was founded by Stewart Lake "Bert" Dennis in 1905 as Shepard and Dennis Transfer Co. It sold firewood, coal and building materials. They also offered draying, piano and furniture moving, and blacksmithing services and served as a general store.

The store that started in Raymond a century ago and expanded to Long Beach in 1933 is still one of the most popular places to get "almost anything." Stewart Lake Dennis never imagined selling razor clam licenses by computer or having HD televisions among the wares in his general store. However, his original idea of meeting the needs of his customers continues through today.

In 1940 the present Long Beach location was constructed at Pacific and Second Street North, including a storage facility for beer, wine, soda and Arden ice cream products. The front of the 50 by 148-foot building was used for retail sales.

In 1968 the Long Beach Dennis Co. came of age as a 4,800-square-foot addition was completed. In 1973 a second story was erected for more storage and office space. In 1986 a 3,400-square-foot clothing retail area and second story was added to give Dennis Co. its present look.

## Blame game starts as government shutdown looms

By ANDREW TAYLOR and ALAN FRAM

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bitterly divided Washington, D.C., hurtled toward a government shutdown today in a partisan stare-down over demands by Democrats for a solution on politically fraught legislation to protect about 700,000 younger immigrants from being deported.

Republicans and Democrats in Congress and the White House traded blame for the increasingly likely shutdown with just hours remaining before the midnight deadline and few signs an agreement would be reached.

Democrats in the Senate have served notice they will filibuster a four-week, governmentwide funding bill that cleared the House Thursday evening. That could expose them to charges that they are responsible for a shutdown, but they point the finger at Republicans instead.

"They're in charge," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said today as he entered his Capitol office. "They're not talking to us. They're totally paralyzed and inept. There's no one to negotiate with."

Republicans controlling the narrowly split chamber argue that it's the Democrats who are holding the government hostage over demands to protect "dreamer" immigrants brought to the country as children and now here illegally.

And the White House piled on, trying to paint the impending action as the "Schumer shutdown." Still, officials said the president has been working the phones trying to avert one.

As a shutdown loomed, the White House said that President Donald Trump would not leave for a planned week-end trip to Florida. The president had been set to leave this afternoon to celebrate the one-year anniversary of his inauguration at his Palm Beach estate.

The impact of the potential shutdown on the planned trip by Trump and much of his Cabinet to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, next week was still undetermined.

Trump entered the fray

early this morning, mentioning the House-approved bill on Twitter, adding: "Democrats are needed if it is to pass in the Senate — but they want illegal immigration and weak borders. Shutdown coming? We need more Republican victories in 2018!"

Trump has given Congress until March 5 to save the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program protecting young immigrants, so "there is absolutely no reason to tie those things together right now," Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said at the White House.

On Capitol Hill, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said he hoped to vote on the House-passed bill "soon," and he said Americans at home would be watching to see "which senators make the patriotic decision" and which "vote to shove aside veterans, military families and vulnerable children to hold the entire country hostage ... until we pass an immigration bill."

In the House, Republicans muscled the measure through on a mostly party-line 230-197 vote after making modest concessions to chamber conservatives and defense hawks.

The chamber backed away from a plan to adjourn for a one-week recess this afternoon, meaning the GOP-controlled House could wait to see if a last-minute compromise would be reached requiring a new vote.

A test vote on a filibuster by Senate Democrats appeared likely before the shutdown deadline. Schumer was rebuffed in an attempt to vote Thursday night.

"We can't keep kicking the can down the road," said Schumer, insisting on more urgency in talks on immigration. "In another month, we'll be right back here, at this moment, with the same web of problems at our feet, in no better position to solve them."

The short-term measure would be the fourth stopgap spending bill since the current budget year started in October. A pile of unfinished Capitol Hill business has been on hold, first as Republicans ironed out last fall's tax bill and now as Democrats insist on progress on immigration.

## Judge lets lawsuit continue against Astoria hash oil makers

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Daily Astorian

A federal judge will let a lawsuit against two former Astoria butane hash oil manufacturers involved in an explosion and fire move forward, without a monetary award, while they seek bankruptcy protection.

An explosion and fire ripped through the basement of a commercial building at Portway and Industry streets in October 2016. Jacob Magley, a contractor working at the site who was badly burned, sued Higher Level Concentrates owners Jason Oei and William "Chris" West in Multnomah County Circuit Court, alleging they had been consuming cannabis in a technique called "dabbing" while making butane hash oil, causing an explosion. The lawsuit seeks \$8.9 million in damages.

Higher Level was fined \$5,300 by state health and safety regulators for failing to ventilate the building, provide an adequate electrical system and obtain city permits.

Magley also sued John



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

The legal fallout continues over an explosion and fire at a marijuana processor in Uniontown in 2016.

Harper, an investor in local marijuana and tobacco stores, and his companies Under the Bridge Cigarettes and UTB Investments, for helping finance the buildout of Higher Level's manufacturing space and for providing the Whip-It! Butane gas used to process hash oil.

Harper's attorneys have sought to insulate Under the Bridge from liability, arguing that Portland company Rich & Rhine Inc., a distributor of the Whip-It! Butane gas provided to Higher Level, and United Brands Products Design Development and Marketing Inc., the manufacturer, are

responsible for any defects.

West and Oei pleaded guilty in August to felony assault in the third degree and misdemeanor reckless endangerment in connection to the explosion and fire. They received three years of probation.

Oei and West both filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy in federal court in October. The fil-

ing allows individuals with a regular income to develop a repayment plan of their debts and save homes from foreclosure. It also stops most collection actions against debtors and their property.

Lawyers for Rich & Rhine and United Brands filed a motion to allow the state lawsuit to proceed during the bankruptcy. U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Peter McKittrick permitted the lawsuit to move forward with discovery and depositions of Oei and West.

"Nothing in this order is intended to permit a money judgment to be entered against either Mr. West or Mr. Oei in the state court case, in each case, so long as the bankruptcy case concerning such debtor remains pending in this court unless this court enters a separate order granting such further relief," McKittrick wrote.

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**\*Human babies only please!\***