

Proposed Renaissance town causing a stir with neighbors

Living history near Cathlamet

By CHLOE SKAAR
The Daily News

CATHLAMET, Wash. — In the next few years, visitors to a valley of dairies and ranches just north of here could be asked to keep their cellphones out of sight and ditch their 21st-century clothes for something a little more medieval.

California natives J.D. Honore and Shira Rauh plan to turn 40 acres in the Elochoman Valley into the “Town of Taylor” — a living history museum, set in 16th-century Europe. Though it could be 20 years before their vision is complete, the couple already knows its major elements, including a two-story inn and a completely closed ecosystem for farming. Merchants, farmers and craftspeople would sell their wares at a year-round Renaissance fair.

Honore and Rauh are complying with county ordinances for such a development, said Wahkiakum County Commissioner Blair Brady, but some of their neighbors still aren't happy about the possibility of living next to a living history town and what it could do to the quiet, secluded settling.

Vicki and Mike Willette have lived in the valley for 18 years. Vicki Willette said



Bill Wagner/The Daily News

J.D. Honore, right, and Shira Rauh envision one day building a Renaissance village on their farm off Elochoman Valley Road near Cathlamet.

she feels heartbroken — after growing up in the area, she said she never planned on living next to an attraction like the Town of Taylor, which will be about 3 miles north of Cathlamet.

“None of us want partying going on for a month long with people dressed up and having sword fights and whatever else they do,” Willette said.

Willette also said her neighbors are concerned about decreased property value and extra traffic on the two-lane country road leading to their neighborhood. Willette and her husband have already considered that they might eventually sell their home if the Town of Taylor brings in enough visitors.

Willette said she and nine of her neighbors have brought

their concerns to county commissioners, but the county doesn't have zoning laws, meaning that Rauh and Honore can use their property as they'd like provided they follow county and environmental codes.

Brady said the couple is doing just that, and he feels “quite certain” they will stick to guidelines, and they've completed an environmental review to give them a better idea of what their farmland could be used for.

“As long as they're following the rules, I have no problem with it,” Brady said. “They have a beautiful farm. They want to raise stock and create an atmosphere of an earlier time. It sounds rather exciting.”

Brady acknowledged traffic might increase, but he sees

that as solvable by creating extra parking or using a shuttle system. He also said Rauh and Honore have been working with the county's planning department to property permit their land for farming, residences and merchants.

“These folks are looking to create something which I think can be a benefit to the community,” Brady said. “There are a lot of ways to work with it. It does not have to be an inconvenience to the folks that are already there.”

‘Total immersion’

Honore and Rauh moved to Washington state from California two years ago, looking for a place they could afford enough land to build the Town of Taylor.

They spend between 15 and 20 weekends each year attending Renaissance fairs, and they say they're inspired to create a “total immersion” Renaissance experience in the Elochoman Valley.

The couple said they're aware of neighbors' concerns and that natural barriers on their property could keep a lot of the “Town of Taylor” from view. Twenty-three of their 40 acres are covered with timber that block the west end of their property from view. The timber is owned by the former landowners — Dale and Margaret Strueby — and will be there for at least 25 more years.

“Ideally, the inside world

doesn't know the outside world exists, and vice versa,” Honore said.

He also said they want neighbors to know there won't be crowds of people or large fairs starting up for at least a few years. Honore said, from his experience, similar fairs that are “slow to grow, are slow to die.”

Rauh said their goal is to give tourists a reason to see the scenic valley, stimulate local business and enhance vacations in southwest Washington.

“There's not a lot of reason to come out (to Elochoman Valley), but they need a reason to stay,” Rauh said.

Their vision is to create a year-round Renaissance fair that is completely self-sustained. They said they don't want to rely on out-of-town visitors to keep the Town of Taylor open. Instead, they plan to hire 30 workers to run the farm and will eventually open the Belladonna Inn, which could host 15 guests and a restaurant — the idea being that the shops and farm will still be open to serve those who live there, even when there aren't many guests.

The apartments and rooms in the inn will have an authentic, 16th-century aesthetic, but TVs, Wi-Fi and other modern electronics would be allowed inside the rooms.

Farm workers and merchants would live in apartments above shops and baker-

ies, providing authentic food and supplies to guests. Honore said he is optimistic construction will be well underway between 2020 and 2022, but Rauh said she thinks it will be more like 20 years before the tiny town is complete.

Dressing the part

Honore and Rauh will require everyone inside to dress in clothes from the 16th century — which guests could rent or buy — and keep electronics and other modern gadgets out of sight, but they won't require anyone to act.

“We want this to be a historical, ‘living history’ town,” Honore said. “The whole point is to be fully immersed in the 16th century.”

For insurance purposes, Rauh and Honore will be required to have their own security, meaning the county wouldn't have to take deputies off the road to supervise events. Rauh said there are guidelines from the Department of Health and Sanitation for the apartments and restaurant, and all the buildings will be permitted by the county.

“We want it to be as historically accurate as legally possible,” Honore said, adding that the couple knows merchants, such as blacksmiths and musicians, in the area who are eager to work for something like the Town of Taylor.

“We don't want to compromise on our vision.”

Chase: If convicted, Medjo faces up to 24 years

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The car then turned into the Chevron gas station on Sixth Street before pulling out and continuing west on Marine Drive, reaching 60 mph. It entered the Roundabout and continued on West Marine Drive, reaching 70 mph as it passed Astoria High School and before turning onto the Old Youngs Bay Bridge.

The officer ended the pursuit after the car turned onto Youngs River Road due to potential danger from the high speeds, Astoria Police Deputy Chief Eric Halverson said.

A Clatsop County Sheriff's Office deputy saw the car on Lewis and Clark Road and started pursuing before eventually stopping. A Warrenton police officer then spotted it on U.S. Highway 101 Business and gave chase.

Police placed spike strips at Miles Crossing. After hitting the spikes, the car crashed into a parked car, causing it

to collide into the side of the Royal Cab building. The car was then driven around the building and struck another parked car before finally stopping.

Preston Alexander Medjo, 23, allegedly exited the car and fled on foot before he was arrested moments later, about 50 minutes after the chase began. His blood alcohol content was 0.04 percent, and officials are investigating whether drugs were also involved.

On Monday, he was charged in Circuit Court with first-degree attempted assault, two counts of attempting to elude, attempted assaulting a public safety officer, second-degree criminal mischief,

driving under the influence of intoxicants, failure to perform the duties of a driver, reckless driving and four counts of reckless endangerment.

If convicted of all charges, Medjo faces up to 24 years in prison.

Medjo was convicted of second-degree assault in June after he struck a man with a wooden club. He was sentenced to 60 days in jail as part of a plea deal with the Clatsop County District Attorney's Office.

His sentence also included five years of probation. In addition to the other counts, Medjo was charged Monday with a probation violation.

“It looks like he might have had some previous charges

that might have influenced his decision to run, even though the officer didn't know that at the time,” Halverson said.

Circuit Court Judge Dawn McIntosh ruled Monday during Medjo's first court appearance that he be held at the Clatsop County Jail without bail for the probation violation charge. He is scheduled for an arraignment in December if he is indicted by a grand jury.



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A vehicle was struck by another vehicle and damaged during a pursuit near Miles Crossing on Thanksgiving.

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