



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Wetsuits for sale at Cleanline Surf.

## Cleanline Surf: Reviews show customers appreciate personal touch



Gizdovich shows off new wetsuit technology — a fuzzy lining inside the suit that helps surfers stay warm.

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“One of the things for us is that our water here is cold year-round,” said Dave Koller, Cleanline’s general manager. “In East Coast shops and Southern California shops, they have cold water seasonally. With our water being cold year-round, we’ve always had the inventory.”

### Expansion

By 2010, Cleanline was moving between five and 10 wetsuits a day online. Gizdovich moved out of his father’s offices and into his current location at the former Seaside Public Library on U.S. Highway 101 across from Broadway Middle School. The sale of his dad’s offices went toward acquiring a nearby warehouse Gizdovich has filled from floor to ceiling with several thousand wetsuits.

About a quarter of the upward of 40 people Gizdovich employs handle online orders from the warehouse. In a bank of offices upstairs, workers answer phone calls and chat messages, troubleshooting and communicating with customers about their purchases.

“We’re literally like an online shop that people would physically walk into,” said Dallas Pattie, a shipper for Cleanline. “They’re stoked when we remember what they ordered last time, and then we ask them how it’s going.”

Heading up the e-commerce business in the warehouse is Matt Gabriel, who worked at the surf shop during summers in high

school and college. Gabriel has since taken Cleanline’s website through two rebuilds to help the surf shop become a more competitive global retailer.

Cleanline used to put anything hot on its website for sale, Gabriel said, but is now at the point of winnowing its online store and focusing on the surfing gear its staff, almost all of whom are at least periodic surfers, knows so well.

“We’ve thought about going on Amazon, but I don’t think we ever will, just because that’s not our style,” he said.

Hanging in the corner of Cleanline’s Seaside showroom dedicated to wetsuits is one of Gizdovich’s first, a heavy, stiff and uncomfortable onesie more reminiscent of an immersion suit. Gizdovich remembers skipping classes to go surfing, returning to class bleeding through his T-shirt from the rashes in the tough early wetsuits.

“It’s just amazing how far suits have come and the technology,” he said. “That thing would just rub on your skin like cement. I still have permanent scars on my armpits.”

Improvements in gear have helped expand surfing from warm waters to a worldwide sport Cleanline helps supply. Gizdovich also ascribes to the “Blue Crush” theory about how the 2002 movie about female surfers accelerated the sport’s expansion.

“When ‘Blue Crush’ was over and all these women started surfing, they had boyfriends, so the boyfriend had to start surfing,” he said.

“And then six months later, they broke up, and you’ve got new boyfriends and new girlfriends who had to start surfing. And then a year later, they broke up. And then a year later, they broke up.”

Cleanline Surf now completes 35 to 40 orders on a given day, and up to 700 on Black Friday, mostly online. Rarely does the shop not ship out an order made before 9 a.m. the same day.

### Five-star reviews

In a tradition Gizdovich has held on to from his early days, every order is topped with Starburst, stickers and a handwritten postcard thanking the customer for choosing Cleanline. The company’s sterling, mostly five-star reviews online tell the story of a customer base that, beyond the lack of sales tax, appreciates the personal touch.

“My box came with my wetsuit, stickers, a handwritten note, candy and wax made for my city’s waters,” said a customer from San Francisco on Yelp in her five-star review. “This was just so considerate that I would never imagine shopping anywhere else again.”

Aside from the improvements in online commerce, the local knowledge and the personal touches, Gabriel has a simpler explanation for why the Seaside surf shop has been so successful in a highly competitive online marketplace.

“Surfers want to buy from surfers, and they want to support a surf shop,” Gabriel said. “All the guys that answer the phone are surfers that know the product, and they’re stoked on it.”

## Grocery Outlet: Co-op general manager ‘not afraid of competition’

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arguments raised by lawyers representing the Astoria Co+op and a Facebook group called Responsible Growth Astoria.

The Astoria Co+op has hired a land use attorney, as well as a traffic engineer, to argue against Grocery Outlet’s application.

“We’re not afraid of competition,” said Matt Stanley, the co-op’s general manager, a statement that would be repeated by others representing the organic and natural food store.

Stanley went on to highlight what the co-op offers and detailed the process the co-op went through to land approval for its new building last year.

He and other co-op rep-

resentatives argued that the location where Grocery Outlet hopes to build is not the right fit, citing issues with the store’s plans to use Marine Drive as its primary access — an access the city typically discourages in this area.

In a memo to the Design Review Committee, Carrie Richter, the co-op’s land use attorney, contested several design issues. She argued that the proposed building’s orientation and parking layout did not meet the city’s criteria and “fails to provide a ‘pedestrian-oriented street’ front and no effort has been made to limit or otherwise hide parking areas from the street.”

The co-op also faced pushback about the location and orientation of its building when it was seeking approval



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**Access is an issue for a new Grocery Outlet proposed off Marine Drive.**

for a new store off Marine Drive and 23rd Street. Much of the criticism came from property owners in the neighboring Mill Pond Village.

The co-op also first sought a zone change for the property to switch it from mixed use, where retail would be allowed only as a conditional

use, to local service, where retail is permitted outright.

People who said they supported the idea of an expanded co-op had similar concerns over increased traffic on Marine Drive. Mill Pond property owners were especially worried about the co-op’s plans to use a narrow

neighborhood road, Steam Whistle Way, as the store’s primary access.

After three Mill Pond property owners appealed the grocery store’s plans to the City Council, the co-op negotiated with them and submitted new designs that changed how the store would be accessed.

Decisions by boards like the Design Review Committee can be appealed to the City Council and, ultimately, to the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

### Facebook campaign

Portland-based attorney Karl Anuta, who has represented groups in Clatsop County and The Dalles opposing Walmart, wrote a letter to the Design Review Committee on behalf of

Responsible Growth Astoria. He asked the committee to reject the site plan or at least ask Grocery Outlet to submit alternative designs.

Responsible Growth Astoria emerged as a Facebook group in July that expressed concerns about where Grocery Outlet planned to build and the potential impact of the store on local businesses and traffic. The group accused the city of fast-tracking the developers’ application.

But Responsible Growth Astoria has since come under scrutiny by residents and community leaders who say they do not know who is behind the campaign. On its Facebook page, the group identifies itself only as “Astoria residents, neighbors and merchants who love our community.”