

Tollgate Store & Restaurant, closed since June, draws potential buyers

Business remains closed, up for sale

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The Tollgate Store & Restaurant is drawing interest from potential buyers after closing permanently earlier this year.

Located on Highway 204 between Weston and Elgin in Umatilla County, the Tollgate Store was the only place on the mountain to stop for food, drinks and supplies until owner Jeff Pinsker decided to close its doors in June.

Pinsker is trying to sell the store, which he ran for 10 years by himself while his business partner, Dylan Van Dyke, lives in California. Ultimately, Pinsker said the day-to-day operations were too much for one person to handle.

"I want it to be successful," Pinsker said. "I just got burned out on it."

The store is not sold yet, though Pinsker said there are "several" buyers interested. He is optimistic about a deal happening soon.

"It's going to be awesome for whoever buys it," he said.

The 1.95-acre property includes a main store and restaurant, two-bedroom home upstairs, four rental units out back and a shop building. It also has two fuel pumps, though they have been out of service for at least three or four years.

Bryan Wagner and Jacqueline Boutell, of College Place, Washington, have expressed interest in buying the store, with their goal to create local jobs and provide badly needed services in the Tollgate area. Tollgate is a haven for outdoor recreation in the Blue Mountains, featuring everything from hunting and fishing to a downhill ski area.

"I see that it can service a lot of people in the area, from the Forest Service to the campgrounds," Boutell said. "It does have a lot of potential."

But first, Wagner said there are a number of logistical hurdles to overcome — not the least of which is the asking price of \$450,000. Umatilla County appraises the property's value at \$272,430, according to an



Tollgate Store proprietor Jeff Pinsker holds a copy of a Bigfoot cast that was given to him by Clifford Barackman, star of the Animal Planet show "Finding Bigfoot," at his store in Tollgate in this January file photo.



The Tollgate Store marks the halfway point between the towns of Weston and Elgin on Highway 204.

assessor's report.

Wagner said he is trying to schedule a meeting with all partners involved to come to an agreement on price, and is willing to wait it out if necessary.

"It isn't a matter of if or when. It's a matter of at what cost," Wagner said.

Even if they are able to purchase the store, Wagner said there are other issues that could tie up development for years. He figures the project could easily take 10 years and \$1 million to do everything they would like to do with the property.

"This is like opening five businesses at once," Wagner said.

For starters, Wagner said they would look to move the grocery store into the separate storage facility, stocking their

shelves with fresh, locally grown food from the Walla Walla Valley. That, in turn, would allow them to have a larger family-style restaurant and bar.

Wagner said they would also like to put the fuel pumps back in service, which he acknowledged would not turn a profit by themselves but would help bring in more customers off the highway while providing an element of convenience for residents on the mountain.

Future phases of the project may include adding more rental cabins, Wagner said. He is confident each new service would go a long way toward reinvigorating Tollgate economically.

"I definitely think it's going to kick it back off," he said. "People who are

invested in Tollgate are not leaving ... It's their relief from the working life."

Together, Wagner and Boutell have been researching the property for nine months after discovering the store for sale last summer. Wagner, who for years lived in Bellevue, Washington, does own his own investment group, though he said this particular project — if it comes to fruition — would be handled through a private lender.

If the deal gets done, the community appears more than ready to welcome the reopening of the store.

Dottie Carrell, who serves as secretary of the Tollgate Trail Finders snowmobile club, said she has had conversations with other property owners about fundraising and donating labor to help with repairs and renovations at the store.

"We just need some (services) on the mountain," Carrell said. "Everybody's motivated on this issue."

Carrell said they intend to hold a community meeting at the snowmobile club lodge, right next to the store, sometime in October to discuss what they can do.

"We're hoping something happens soon," she said.

Contact George Plaver at gplaver@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

ARLINGTON



Photo contributed by Oregon State Police

A fiery crash killed a man and closed Interstate 84 near Arlington on Monday.

Fiery wreck kills man, shuts down I-84

East Oregonian

A man was killed Monday night in a fiery wrong-way crash on Interstate 84 at Arlington.

According to a news release from the Oregon State Police, the driver of a green 2003 Ford Windstar was seen driving west about 7:40 p.m. in the eastbound lanes near milepost 141. A few minutes later the van crashed head-on into a semi tractor-trailer carrying vehicles.

Witnesses reported the van had been traveling as fast as 60 mph, and after the collision the van came to rest on

top of the center divider. The semi caught fire, completely blocking all lanes of the interstate for several hours. The interstate remained closed until Tuesday morning.

The driver of the van died at the scene and police are withholding his name until next of kin can be reached. The driver of the semi, Santos Colunga, 24, from California, was treated at the scene for non-life threatening injuries.

OSP was assisted on-scene by Gilliam County Sheriff's Office, ODOT, North Gilliam Fire and the Department of Environmental Quality.

PENDLETON

ODOT provides primer on rapid flash beacons

East Oregonian

The Oregon Department of Transportation addressed concerns some Pendleton residents have about "rapid flash beacons," specifically at the intersection of Southwest Frazer Avenue and 13th Street.

The beacons emit light in all directions and are more visible to motorists on Frazer Avenue as well as 13th Street than the old traffic signal, according to the written statement from ODOT. The curb extensions that bump out into Frazer from the sidewalk also create a safer environment for pedestrians and help highlight the intersection as a crosswalk.

The state transportation agency provided this primer on how the crosswalk flashing beacons operate:

Pedestrian pushes the button near crossing sign when they are ready to cross the street.

When activated, the beacon begins flashing, alternating yellow lights similar to the pace of a strobe light.

When lights are flashing

and/or when pedestrians are present at the crosswalk, motorists need to stop ahead of the intersection.

Once all vehicles are stopped, the pedestrian can travel across the roadway.

ODOT also advised that pedestrians "should make eye contact with drivers and ensure their vehicles have come to a complete stop before crossing the road."

Motorists are free to travel after pedestrians have passed through the lane they are using plus one additional lane, according to the statement.

The rapid flash beacons "are improving safety for pedestrians at other sites in Pendleton, Umatilla County and across the state," according the department, which recently installed one of the beacons along Highway 395 in Pilot Rock.

More information about pedestrian safety, including rapid flash beacons, is posted at <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Safety/Pages/Pedestrian.aspx>.

Check the brochures and posters menu tab for links to printable materials you can share with others.

HERMISTON

Tacos y Mas opens near high school

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Owners of a new Mexican restaurant in Hermiston hope its location near Hermiston High School will help keep business booming.

Socorro and Maria Orozco have opened Tacos y Mas at the corner of Highway 395 and Highland Avenue. The building had previously been used by 395 Quickstop to serve a combination of Mexican and American food.

The Orozcós have experience working as cooks at other Mexican restaurants in the area and are serving up street tacos, enchiladas, tamales, menudo and other authentic Mexican dishes.

"It's authentic," Maria's daughter Jessica said. "They cook here every day. It's homemade every day."

She said people can call ahead to order take-out if they prefer, and the Orozcós hope to get the building's drive-through up and running, too. The restaurant will offer specials to high school students during lunch. The proximity to the high school, where students often walk down Highland during lunch, was one of the

reasons the Orozcós chose the location.

"They finally found a place that was perfect," Jessica said. "It's right on 395, also because the high school is so close we're able to provide lunches for the students."

Tacos y Mas is open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Sundays. For more information call 541-289-0228.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Tacos and a burrito sit on a table at Tacos y Mas.

SUBMIT COMMUNITY NEWS

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Nancy Ortiz-Ochoa
Senior – Umatilla High School

Nancy Ortiz-Ochoa is an outstanding, hard-working, self-motivated student at Umatilla High School. Nancy is a senior with a 4.17 weighted cumulative GPA. She is a part of our ASB leadership program and is a senior class officer. Every year in high school, she has also participated in volleyball, basketball and track and exemplifies a true student athlete. Nancy also participates in T.A.G., National Honor Society and Key Club where she volunteers to complete many service projects. Next year, Nancy is planning on attending Blue Mountain Community College and completing her associates degree.

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