

MOUNTAIN LIFE

Life and business in Meacham suit Hermiston couple

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

MEACHAM — Dave Borup gets a kick out of showing diners his new “menu” at Meacham’s Oregon Trail Store and Deli.

He explained the “Roadkill Cafe” takes advantage of Oregon’s law that went into effect Jan. 1, allowing drivers to salvage deer or elk they strike on accident. Dave’s menu expands on that with “Chunk of Skunk,” “Rack of Raccoon” and “Anything Dead ... In Bread.”

Some customers laugh, he said, others get wide-eyed for a moment. Then his eyes got a bit wider.

“I’m waiting,” he said, “for the day that someone tries to come in with a dead animal.”

He would fly to the door, he remarked, arms outstretched to keep them at bay. Fun is fun, but this kitchen is not serving up someone’s fresh kill.

Dave and his significant other, Sonya Kestner, hail from Hermiston and graduated from the town’s high school, she in 1984 and he in 1992. They bought a cabin near Meacham in the Blue Mountains in the summer of 2017 and got to know Dixie Earle, then owner of the store and deli. Dave said he told her the business might pickup if there were a signs out on Interstate 84 letting drivers know about the cafe.

Dixie’s response, he recalled, was to the point: “The place is for sale.”

Dave and Sonya said they mulled it over. He worked in construction for 16 years, a good job with union pay and



Bacon sizzles on the grill in the kitchen at Oregon Trail Store and Deli in Meacham.

Staff photos by Ben Lonergan



benefits. Sonya worked for about 20 years in food service for the Hermiston School District, or, as she put it, she was a “lunch lady.” They made the move and bought the store and cafe that fall.

“Neither one of us ever owned a business,” Sonya said.

“We jumped into this thing head first.”

“It’s hard work here,” Dave said, but the hardest part for him was learning to tame his mouth. The kind of language and attitudes that might occur on a construction job won’t fly at the cafe.

MORE INFORMATION

You can visit the Oregon Trail Store & Deli at 64364 Old Oregon Trail Road, Meacham. For hours of operation and more information, call the business at 541-983-2520 or check it out on Facebook.

“This is a family restaurant,” he said.

They run the place seven days a week with help from a couple of employees. Sonya handles all the cooking and Dave takes on other tasks.

“I’ve been fired from cooking by lots of customers,” he joked.

Sonya’s cooking, however, is no joke. The French toast is hearty, so take it into consideration when she asks if you want a half or whole order, particularly if you add a side of four

pieces of Hill Meat Co. bacon.

Tuesday afternoons they offer a special on tacos, and weekends tend to be the busiest time. Dave and Sonya this week took a small break for the Fourth of July. Dave’s son and his family drove from Indiana to visit.

The breather comes a couple weeks before the rumble of motorcycles fills the mountain air. The business is a stop on the poker run during Pendleton Bike Week. Perhaps as many as 1,000 motorcycle enthusiasts stop during the third week in July.

“There’s motorcycles everywhere,” Dave said. “It’s pretty cool.”

Owning the cafe and store also means running Meacham’s post office, which has about 100 mailboxes. “It’s good for the community,” Sonya said. “It’s part of the community.”

She also stressed how much the locals mean to them.

“They help support us terrifically,” she said, especially in the winter.

Longtime Meacham resident Nancy Nyberg comes each morning to the cafe for a cup of tea. She said Dave and Sonya are doing fine work but would not mind if they had a little more business. Dave said he’s looking into how to get those road signs up.

But he and Sonya are happy here. They spend time at their cabin but live onsite, so they don’t drive much to work. Dave said he could not think of a better place to spend his life than this rustic community. Sonya said she came down Tuesday morning and watched six cow elk outside the business.

“We’re pretty lucky,” she said. “Not many people get an opportunity to live and work in the mountains.”



LEFT Owner and chef Sonya Kestner pours coffee for diners at the Oregon Trail Store and Deli. Kestner spent most of her career in food service before quitting to buy the restaurant and store last year. RIGHT Owner Dave Borup serves a cup of tea to Nancy Nyberg, a regular at the deli, who often comes in for a cup of tea or to check her mail.

The Oregon Trail Store and Deli sits along Old Highway 30 in Meacham. Under new ownership, the store continues to be a fixture in the community, serving as not only a restaurant and store, but also the community post office.

