

Closing:

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the beleaguered chain across the country. It has also been selling or assigning KMart store leases to Target. More than 70 Sears stores were slated to close, Axios reported on May 25, 2022.

Transformco acquired the struggling retailers out of bankruptcy. Federal Judge Robert Drain in New York authorized a deal to sell the major remaining assets of Sears to its chairman, largest shareholder and former CEO Eddie Lampert's hedge fund, ESL Investments, USA Today reported on Feb. 7, 2019.

As Sears' retail footprint kept dwindling, Transformco said in 2021 it would begin to market the chain's 273-acre corporate headquarters in the Chicago suburb of Hoffman Estates, Illinois, to potential buyers in 2022. Transformco also is considering other redevelopment uses for the site, the Chicago Tribune reported on Dec. 16.

"The Main Street site is a beautiful spot for a retailer," Vaughn observed. "We put in the pad catercorner from the Marigold, so that customers could back in to load appliances."

The former home of Wicked Kitty Tattoo & Piercing next door at 132 S. Main remains for rent, as is the adjoining historic Club Cigar Saloon building. But elsewhere on Main Street, business is good.



John Tillman/East Oregonian

"Store closing event" flyers hang on all items Monday, Aug. 29, 2022, at the Sears Hometown Store in downtown Pendleton. Displays also advise all sales are final.

"We're full up across the street," Vaughn's development partner Imsland said, referring to tenants in the building containing Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's, 137 S. Main St.

But a block south, another downtown anchor is shutting its doors — Dean's Pendleton Athletic.

Dean's owner Cari Broker started working in the store part time in 1992, after graduating from Blue Mountain Community College. She is founder Dean Fouquette's sister-in-law. He started the business in 1980.

"Then I stayed and went full time," she said. "I bought

the business in 2015." Broker attributed the need to close to changes over the past seven years.

"Changes have occurred in retail in general, with more shopping on line," Broker noted. "Others have been specific to Pendleton and its downtown. Penney is gone and Maurice's has moved."

Downtown has lost foot traffic, Broker said, despite its restaurants.

"The detailed changes include decline in youth and high school sports participation," she continued. "The numbers aren't drastic, but there has been slow decline

due to video games and kids being interested in different things."

These changes and falling enrollment in the Pendleton School District have led to declining sales, making it difficult for Broker to estimate the specifics of inventory.

"Even before COVID, we weren't selling as much for a year to two years," Broker said. "Then the virus hit in 2020. It was huge for this part of retail. No one was playing sports, which were big for here. The community was great. They wanted to help, but it's a simple correlation



Mackenzie Whaley/East Oregonian

Store closing signs on Monday, Aug. 29, 2022, adorn windows of the Sears Hometown Store, 124 S. Main St., Pendleton.

— with no organized youth or school sports, demand for athletic gear and uniforms crashed."

Then a combination of factors further hurt business after pandemic lockdowns lifted.

"Inflated costs for products and shipping affects all of us, retailers and consumers alike," Broker said. "And the lack of availability. Local customers were constantly calling in, wanting to buy products that we just didn't have."

Since summer 2021, the lack of inventory really pinched profits, Broker said.

"Suppliers couldn't get products, since production was coming to a halt," she said. "Wholesalers were just waiting. Then two major suppliers, Nike and Under Armour, told me my account had been closed, due to

changes to their selling procedures. If you don't have things to sell, you don't have a business. If I can't bring in the public to sell them things, I can't make a living."

All these changes have made for quite a ride for business, she said, but on a personal level, she said she feels blessed to have been a part of the store during its peak years.

It has been so much fun to have connections with big and little athletes and their families, with youth and high school sports," she said. "It's perfect when I can serve what is needed. I feel charmed."

Broker said she has no regrets.

"It was not my plan, but I look back on 30 years with a smile on my face," she said. "I've sold cleats to parents to whom I sold cleats when they were kids."



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Pendleton High School students hangout Tuesday morning, Aug. 30, 2022, outside the school at the start of the fall term.

School:

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they're nervous. We have no masks, so we finally get to see people and smile. I think that it's going to be a change, but we're all so excited to be back."

Students also expressed excitement, but some also felt the return to classrooms was a bit nerve-racking.

"It feels weird, it feels unreal," said Marilla Holden, a freshman at Pendleton High, while she looked for her first classroom of the day. "Especially because we were online for so long, I don't feel like I even did middle school."

On the other side of the high school spectrum, senior Thomas Carlos said this scene felt familiar.

"Summer went by really fast, I don't feel much of a difference between my junior and senior year, so far," he said.

Whatever students may be feeling, embracing positivity is core to Spanish teacher Kathryn Youngman's approach to returning to the classroom.

"I think of course there are



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Spanish teacher Kathryn Youngman, 58, greets her students as they enter her classroom Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2022, at Pendleton High School.

challenges, but us as teachers can look at them as negative or positive. I choose positive," Youngman said. "I'm going to look at those challenges and take what we've been given and make the best out of the situation. The kids are awesome, you've got to love teenagers."

All in all, excitement filled Pendleton High's hallways as

students milled about exploring what will soon become their morning routines. Students found their lockers, searched for classrooms and reunited with their friends.

"The large scale goal for us is relationships above all," Dutcher said. "I feel like Pendleton High School is probably the best start of the school year with two

weeks here, which gives our students and staff an opportunity to build those relationships with kids before we go into our Round-Up break."

He said there is "no secret to the sauce" — it's about students seeing teachers as reliable resources.

"We build great relationships," Dutcher said, "and we move forward all together."

Golf:

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Play begins at 7 a.m. Sept. 2, with the second wave of players at 11:50 a.m. Admission for fans is \$5 per day.

"My goal is to be playing on Sunday," Greb said. "These players are some of the best in the world, but if I play well, you never know. I feel like my game is in a good place."

Epson Tour players have been in Pendleton since Aug. 29, playing the course and trying to get a feel for the greens.

"It's Monday and the tournament doesn't start until Friday," Greb said. "You can tell it's their whole lifestyle and career. I know some of the players, but I haven't seen them in a while."

Knowledge of the course is where Greb may have an advantage. Wildhorse is Pendleton High School's main course, and Greb has played there most of her career.

"I think it's a huge advantage to come back to your home course," Greb said. "I know the course. It's a big event and the course is in really good shape. I am comfortable out there, which

is key. It will be good."

Greb, 23, has spent most of the summer in Utah playing golf and working at a golf course.

"I will finish my masters in December, and my goal is to turn professional next fall," she said. "I will go back to Tulsa and work on my game. I will go to Q-school next fall and try to make it through there and get a tour schedule set."

Stage one of qualifying school begins in August 2023 at Mission Hills Country Club in Palm Springs.

Greb was in Pendleton early in the week to help with the youths golf clinic Aug. 29 and 30 at Birch Creek and Wildhorse, along with other tournament players.

Also earning a sponsor exemption was Therese Warner of Kennewick, who played high school golf at Southridge, then went on to play at University of Arizona for two years. She recently turned pro and competes on the East Coast Women's Pro Golf Tour.

She won the Lake Jovita Women's Championship in Dade City, Florida, in March.

"I was catching up with her today," Greb said. "She was telling me about her transition to pro golf. She said she is enjoying it a lot more than college."

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