

Long Creek motors along with can-do spirit

Mayor: ‘We don’t have soup lines over here’

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Long Creek is a can-do community.

Although there isn’t a cornucopia of growth happening presently, the town of 190 is holding steady with some improvements in the works.

Mayor Don Porter said the growth he’s seen over the last 10 years has been “astronomical.”

“We went from no business — no store, no gas station, no nothing — (to) now, a top-of-the-line mechanic service in Long Creek ... a full-service restaurant, chuck wagon and two stores,” he said.

“We do everything we can to support the local businesses,” he said.

He recalls when people walked around with gas cans, before OK Garage was established.

Now, he’s having repairman Isaac Studtmann install a transmission in his car.

“That’s phenomenal in my book,” Porter said.

Studtmann and his wife, Bailey, bought OK Garage last August from Craig and Donna Palmer.

The business includes a fueling station, a full-service repair shop and a convenience store.

Long Creek Lodge is another well-established business.

Porter said the prices at the Long Creek General Store are reasonable compared with other stores in the county, but added he “would be willing to pay 7-11 prices just to have a store.”

The Kitchen Cupboard is a new home-operated business owned by Lynelle and Arlin Hurst who make salsa and jams, sold at local stores.

Residents of Long Creek



Lynelle Hurst of Long Creek and her daughter Courtney Hurst sell jams at the Keerins Hall Holiday Bazaar last December. Lynelle and her husband Arlin own a home-operated business call The Kitchen Cupboard.



Isaac Studtmann performs some regular maintenance on a semi-truck at the OK Garage in Long Creek. He and his wife, Bailey, bought the OK Garage & Mini Market in August of 2018.

may enjoy the slower pace, overall, but many hope to see their internet connection speed up with broadband.

Porter’s wife, Denise, a teacher at Long Creek School, is on the Grant

County Digital Network Coalition board and is committed to doing what she can to bring broadband speeds to the community.

“It’s been slow — a little bit higher than dial-up,”

Don Porter said, adding broadband has 25 megabits per second, and tests on the local internet show Long Creek’s at 1.1.

The mayor said he is seeing potential in a new subdivision with 14 lots located 6 miles east of Long Creek.

The development, called Long Creek Ranch Properties, includes a road system with power, and so far, there is one new Palm Harbor double-wide on the property.

“It’s an interesting development, because it’s so close to Long Creek,” he said. “It’s a unique addition to the area.”

“There were two or three families that came through this weekend that said, ‘We’d really like to live here,’” he said.

The city’s infrastructure is sound, Don Porter said. The 40-year-old sewer plant was built for 800 people — the city has 100 hookups but could serve 300. The public water system hasn’t seen a major leak, with costs ranging from \$5,000-7,000, since 2013.

To the town’s credit, the Long Creek Volunteer Fire Department received accreditation through the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training in 2018.

“Very few cities the size of Long Creek would have the accreditation,” said Don Porter, who is also the fire chief. His wife is the department’s training officer and hosts trainings for other departments.

The future site of the historical Fort Townsend on West Main Street (Highway 402), draws interest from passersby with its fortress-like fence, but the museum has not reached completion.

Fort Townsend is named for a local man, William “Billy” Townsend, who is credited with saving the Long Creek community during the 1878 Bannock and Paiute Indian War.

During the uprising, local people hastily built a fort east of town where settlers gathered to defend themselves. Townsend, a veteran of the Civil War, prevented members of the approaching tribes from entering the fort.

The Long Creek Historical Society has been striving for years to establish a home for their collec-

tion of local artifacts, documents and other historical memorabilia. The group is in the midst of a five-year plan to solicit input from Long Creek citizens on the direction and future of the museum and site.

Don Porter said he’d like to see some younger residents involved in the project.

Reiba Carter Smith, who is a member of the historical society, said they are still seeking funding to complete the project, and they’ve received some grant-writing assistance from Elaine Eisenbraun.

While Fort Townsend is on the west side of Main Street, Long Creek School is on the east side.

The mayor said he’s happy the Grant County Road Department will install a flashing school-zone traffic light near the school.

“It’s the only county road that goes by a school,” he said. “Grant County has really stepped up to the plate. We’re feeling really good about that.”

Don Porter said the school district’s budget is sound, and the staff and students are an important part of the community.

“The school is front and center around here,” he said.

The benefits of the Great American Eclipse of 2017 are still raining down on Long Creek School, due to the volunteer work of staff and students.

Visitors from around the globe filled the upper and lower athletic fields at the school that year, camping and enjoying the hospitality of the locals.

During the five-day celebration, astronomy experts taught workshops on the total solar eclipse and held star-gazing events with visitors donating funds to the school.

Long Creek teachers Patch Freeman and Denise Porter, who contributed an article for the educators’ magazine “Today’s OEA,” wrote: “The majority of people who paid for camping spaces were families and serious eclipse enthusiasts. They saw spending their eclipse dollars on helping our school as a bonus.”

The school’s office manager and deputy clerk Jennifer Garinger said the fundraiser was created to remodel the school cafeteria.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter
Long Creek School is ‘front and center’ for their community, said Mayor Don Porter.

That work was completed last summer, and the upgrades included new flooring, stainless steel prep tables and a fresh coat of paint. Resident James Hercher also painted a Mountaineer, the school mascot, on one wall.

Garinger said it hadn’t had a facelift in 20 years or more.

“It looks sharp down there,” she said.

With a surplus of funds, the school’s offices will also see upgrades this summer, including new windows in the front offices, which will allow staff to see people approaching the building, she said.

Five classrooms will benefit from the floor fund, a pot of money raised through a yard sale of surplus school equipment, such as older desks.

“We do a little at a time as the money is available,” Garinger said.

Because housing is tight in Long Creek, she said the school district has built four homes for staff members to rent, and another is currently under construction on the west side of the school with the foundation recently poured.

The school’s strong foreign-exchange program, which has been in place for several years, boosts student numbers and brings world culture to the school and the town.

Six of those students have or will soon be leaving for their homes, mostly overseas.

In the small community, Don Porter said, “a lot of tears will be shed.”

Garinger hosted Jesus Olmos of Mexico and Tiger Zeng of China. Other foreign exchange students included Henry Grannis of Germany, Cherie Lee of South Korea, Jammy Santhob of Thailand and Mathéo Buchart of France.

“I’ve hosted for four years,” Garinger said. “I have nine children of my own. I’m a kid person and have four sons at home — adding two more to the mix is not a big deal.”

She’s planning to host students from Thailand and Vietnam next school year.

“My children have friends from all over the world, especially now with social media,” she said. “My son interacts with his host brother almost every day.”

Mayor Porter said, although Long Creek is a small community and probably not as thrilling as staying in a bigger city where they might see fancy sports cars, the foreign exchange students enjoy their stay.

“They want to come back,” he said.

One boy came to stay, then his sister came another year, then another sister, he said.

“They don’t only learn about this country, but interact with kids from other countries,” he said.

Porter said not everyone in Long Creek wants to see major growth and change.

He said about five years ago plans were made to bring the mill back and hire 14 people — but not 14 Long Creek residents, because not many would be qualified to work there.

Porter, who has been owner and operator of Blue Mountain Herbs for 20 years, said he’s happy with the gains he’s seen in the town over the last 10 years.

“Everything is going good,” he said. “We don’t have soup lines over here.”

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