

# Paytons buy the Sweeney mortuary

-Continued from PAGE ONE

Undeterred, Josh used this as a steppingstone, channeling his experiences and the values instilled by his late mother toward his new venture

When opportunity knocked at an unlikely moment during an Oregon State University tailgate, it opened up a whole new world for one unsuspecting funeral director. Little did he know that striking up a conversation with the couple parked next to them would set him on a path that would change his life and lead him to the quaint town of Heppner. "I really had no idea Heppner existed before this," he admitted.

Though initially reluctant, the exchange of business cards that day would soon bear fruit. Days later, he received a call from Pat Sweeney himself. Reflecting on that conversation, he joked, "Pat didn't inquire about my credentials or experience, but he was curious if I had a family." It was then he realized that Pat was seeking someone who would maintain the family-oriented ethos of the business, rather than sell out to a corporation.

Despite having anchored his life in Albany for 20 years, repeated discussions with the Sweeneys and a heartfelt visit to Heppner earlier this year convinced him and his family to consider relocating. "This is something we can do," he said, moved by the warm, small-town ambiance. The clean environment, far removed from the hustle of city life, also appealed to them.

The transition decision was aided by a meticulous list of pros and cons, and it was not long before the positives outweighed the mere inconveniences noted as cons. The allure of good schools and a safe community were significant factors. Any initial apprehensions about being welcomed were quickly dispelled at the Sweeneys'



retirement party where the community embraced them warmly.

He humorously remarked on unique Sweeney custom 'the Sweeney handshake,' where you touch the other person's wrist while shaking hands. Another charming revelation was the town's generous spirit during Halloween, as Pat referred to themselves as 'the full-sized candy bar house.' This was a delightful prospect given that their previous residence saw scant Halloween activity.

While he confessed that owning a funeral home was never his initial ambition, he emphasized his preference for a more personal business approach over the corporate world. "It's about being a part of a community that cares for each other," he stated, encapsulating the essence of what drew him to Heppner.

Parallel to his career journey, Josh's personal life flourished when he met his future wife Rachael through his sister, who had been Rachael's college roommate and sorority sister. Their love story began during a transformative phase when Josh was relocating to Oregon for college. Despite the physical distance, their relationship only grew stronger, and after years of long-distance dating, they married in 2011. Together, they have two children, Rebecca, 6, and Lucas, who is just about to turn 4.

Rachel, who has an established career as a property manager, is also planning a career transition. Inspired by her husband's profession, she intends to join him at the funeral home, starting in administrative roles before training to become a

funeral director herself.

In a heartfelt revelation, Josh shared how the former owners, the Sweeney family, generously agreed to allow him and his wife a monthly weekend respite to visit the support system in Albany they worked hard to build, and eventually they plan on moving Rachael's mother to Heppner as well. "It's really gracious of them, they didn't have to do that at all," said Josh, expressing deep appreciation for this remarkable arrangement that sustains their family ties.

Originally slated to transition fully in September, plans shifted slightly as Josh assumed the role of Operating Manager on September 4th. While awaiting complete licensure, Peyton remains optimistic, citing a shared commitment with the Sweeneys to ensure the Payton family's success. "I know that the Sweeneys have our best interest at heart," he affirmed, projecting confidence in the mutually supportive work dynamic.

The move to a more rural setting is expected to free up time for the Payton's, who were accustomed to managing around 200 cases annually across several communities. This ease promises a better quality of life and more opportunities for family bonding.

Josh expressed palpable excitement about working closely with his wife in this new venture. "It's exciting that we get to do this whole thing together. This would be way scarier if it was just me... She gives me the confidence to know that we can do it," he shared, reflecting on the courage it takes to leap into entrepreneurship and relocate after two decades in Albany.

Today, as he settles into his new role and town, it's clear that sometimes the best opportunities in life come from the most unexpected places - like a casual chat at a tailgate party.

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## Oregon Department of Forestry Wildfire Risk Map Released for Morrow County Property Owners

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) has published its updated Wildfire Risk Map, categorizing properties as low, moderate, or high wildfire risk. Morrow County property owners are encouraged to visit the link below and review their property's classification.

Those who believe their risk level is incorrect have 60 days from the release of the final map to file an appeal. Appeals must include supporting documentation, such as evidence of fire mitigation or property changes.

Visit the ODF Wildfire Risk Map Portal to review classifications and find more information about the appeals process at the link below.

For more information, contact the Morrow County Planning Department:  
Stephen Wrecsics, GIS Analyst at 541.922.4624

<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/Pages/wildfire-hazard.aspx>

### SOUTH MORROW CO SENIORS MATTER

## OCTOBER SENIOR MEALS

Tuesdays, 11:30 am  
St Patrick's Dining Room, 60 plus Free, 59 and under \$5

Oct 1 Chili and Cornbread Fruit salad Dessert	Oct 8 Fettucini Alfredo with Chicken Garden Salad Garlic Bread Dessert
Oct 15 Broccoli and Bacon Casserole Fried Potatoes and Onions Applesauce Dessert	Oct 22 Taco Bar Refried Beans Dessert
Oct 29 Smorgasbord	

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MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

### SOUTH MORROW CO SENIORS MATTER

## OCTOBER YOLO Activities

ST PATRICK SENIOR CENTER, 190 N MAIN ST, HEPPNER

Tuesday Oct 1 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:30 Senior Lunch 4:30 Yoga	Wednesday Oct 2 6:30 Chair Exercises	Thursday Oct 3 8:30 Chair Exercises 4:30 Yoga	Tuesday Oct 8 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:30 Senior Lunch 4:30 Yoga
Wednesday Oct 9 6:30 Chair Exercises	Thursday Oct 10 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:00 Aging Well Class 4:30 Yoga	Tuesday Oct 15 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:30 Senior Lunch 4:30 Yoga	Wednesday Oct 16 6:30 Chair Exercises
Thursday Oct 17 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:00 Craft Class 4:30 Yoga	Tuesday Oct 22 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:30 Senior Lunch 4:30 Yoga	Wednesday Oct 23 6:30 Chair Exercises	Thursday Oct 24 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:00 Getting to Know Dementia 4:30 Yoga
Friday Oct 25 6:00 Movie Night	Tuesday Oct 29 8:30 Chair Exercises 11:30 Senior Lunch 4:30 Yoga	Wednesday Oct 30 6:30 Chair Exercises	Thursday Oct 31 8:30 Chair Exercises 9:00 Halloween Party 4:30 Yoga

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