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Smoke taint worries, grape glut hang over Napa Valley harvest

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After 60 years, you'll no longer find Petersens at Ace

By Pat Hampton

Tribune Publisher

It wasn't the pandemic, it wasn't the wildfires or the economy – it was time.

After 60 years the Petersen family is closing the iron gates on its legacy at Silverado Ace Hardware store and retiring.

Owners MaryAnn and Tim Petersen, and Tim's brother, Mark Petersen, made the announcement last weekend after they feted their 13 store employees at a pizza party in their Lincoln Avenue parking lot.

"We told them it was to thank them for their hard work, for being helpful and for winning the Spirit of Calistoga Community Award," Tim Petersen said Monday. "I told them the pandemic will be over one of these days, that there had been a lot of change, but that change can be good; it can be exciting."

The hardware store staff listened – many have worked there for decades and have heard Tim's speeches before – and jostled playfully.

"Then I said, speaking of which, come the first week of October, Mark, MaryAnn and I will be retiring," he said. There was a collective gasp. He explained that the three of them had started to look for a new owner to purchase the store in the spring. Mark Schulein of Newport Beach was standing at the edge of the small crowd and Tim introduced him as their new employer.

"Mark 'has been wanting to retire for the past 20 years,'" Tim said. "MaryAnn and I weren't quite ready, but it was time." Covid-19, he said, was just "one of those little bumps



PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Longtime Silverado Ace Hardware owners Mark Petersen, left, and his brother, Tim, right, have sold the business and the property to Huntington Beach resident Mark Schulein, center. Schulein is president of Crown Ace Hardware, a family-owned and operated chain that began in 1949 as a single 'mom and pop' store in Corona del Mar. Crown Ace owns stores in 20 communities across three states.

in the road" and wasn't the cause of the sale. As a designated essential business, the hardware store was not subject to closure and has weathered the ravages of the pandemic well, he said.

He contacted Jeff Schulein, an Ace Hardware store owner in Southern California whom Tim has known for over 35 years. While vacationing in the area, Schulein would drop his wife off to go shopping and he would drive to Calistoga to talk hardware with the Petersens. Tim said they had a similar philosophy about small hardware stores being community-oriented and good to their employees. The elder Schulein retired five years ago and had sold his part of the

business to his son, Mark, 51, who owns a dozen hardware stores of his own and is a partner with a friend in 10 others, with five in Northern California, four in Arizona, and one in Hawaii. He's worked retail since he was 13, including his college days when he sold surfboards while majoring in marine science and art. He finally moved into the family hardware business.

Petersen said he wanted the new owners to prize his staff as much as he, his wife and brother have, recognizing them as a part of the family and a big part of Silverado Ace Hardware's success. Tim said he has had offers on the property before, but developers wanted to tear down

the old building and put in office and retail space and weren't interested in a hardware store. The Petersens agreed the Schulein's would be a good fit.

Schulein said all of the stores his company owns are similar to Calistoga's. "They're small town, super local. If we don't retain the employees, then all I'm buying is a box of stuff."

Schulein spent the weekend measuring the old building and imagining how he might take it to the next level. Because he has so many other stores to draw from, Schulein said he wants to expand inventory and space by

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Transformer glitch foils power plan

■ PG&E uses Hwy. 29 substation to energize Calistoga through PSPS

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Pacific Gas & Electric used its Highway 29 substation to keep the lights on in most of Calistoga during its first Public Safety Power Shutoff initiated Monday night.

The utility company's plan had been to use the new \$4 million Washington Street micro-grid – powered by some nine industrial generators – but it was never turned on, mayor Chris Canning said.

On Tuesday morning around 10 a.m. in the middle of the PPS, a random transformer outage on Grant Street knocked out power to parts of Calistoga – including the entire downtown area – that otherwise would've been energized, the mayor told the Tribune. That problem was corrected and power restored by 1 p.m. that same day.

PG&E gave Canning no other reason for the use of the substation during the PPS than "it was a switching problem," he said. Typically, the substation is shutdown during a PPS because the transmission lines that carry power to and from are in a fire threat area.

Canning said PG&E had tested the new micro-grid generator station prior to Monday and reported that it was ready for action. This week's PPS would've been the system's first "real, live" test.

Overall, this week's PPS affected 172,000 customers in 22 counties, including 5,018 customers in Calistoga, St. Helena and surrounding unincorporated areas.

Improved weather conditions Wednesday morning led to PG&E beginning its power restoration process earlier than expected.

2020 harvest challenged by smoke taint worries, grape glut

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Consecutive days of triple-digit temperatures in mid-August and again last weekend initiated the red grape harvest last week in parts of Napa Valley, including Calistoga where some growers have begun picking small lots of cabernet sauvignon, zinfandel, malbec and petite syrah.

Along with the heat, growers are contending with thick, smoky air – a product of the many wildfires still raging throughout parts of northern California, Oregon, Idaho and Colorado – as well as an over abundance of grapes that can't be sold.

"There's 1,000 tons of Napa Valley cabernet for sale right now and there's no buyers," Calistoga grower and vintner

Vince Arroyo said Wednesday. "I've got 30 ton I probably won't even pick."

Word throughout the industry is that Arroyo isn't the only grower who will leave tons of Napa Valley's prized grape crop to wither on the vines. With cabernet averaging between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a ton (some vineyards command four and five times that amount) grape buyers are inclined to look to other areas of California for much cheaper fruit.

A quick search of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers' Napa Winegrape Market page this week showed 1,525 tons of a number of different 2020 varietals for sale.

While an excess supply of winegrapes is a reality for many, the issue of smoke

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Calistoga grape grower, winery owner and wine-maker Vincent Arroyo stands among his estate-grown cabernet vineyards on Dunaweal Lane Wednesday afternoon. Arroyo, who began growing grapes in Calistoga in 1973, is less worried about smoke taint than he is about a grape glut.

PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER