

# Headlight-Herald

SERVING TILLAMOOK

Headlight-Herald.com August 29, 2007

## Growth trumps flood concerns

Development continues to flourish at North U.S. 101 entrance to Tillamook

Part Three, concluding a series

By SHASTA KEARNS MOORE  
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TILLAMOOK — In the 1980s, businesses and homes along the stretch of highway north of Tillamook had a rather unpleasant problem, according to former mayor Don Hurd. The winter floods would damage the area's septic tanks and even cause some to float to the top, creating a serious health hazard.

So the city annexed the area now known as North Main. See GROWTH, Page A12



General contractor Richard Coon works on a project to raise Northport Plaza on U.S. 101 high enough to avoid flooding that caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to the 12-unit complex in November. Though North Main Avenue is experiencing a construction boom, seasonal flooding remains a major concern among many who have built or are planning to build along the main route into Tillamook.

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## GROWTH: North in demand because of traffic flow

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as North Main, clearing the way not just for sewers but for economic development that has continued to this day in this flood-prone area of Tillamook. "We had a lot of demands out in that area because of the traffic flow. Same story today, really," Hurd said. "With any large company, they look at the traffic count — and that means (U.S.) 101 North."

Recently, a number of large companies have either moved in or spruced up their facilities, adding to a revitalization trend in Tillamook.

The Tillamook County Creamery Association's huge tourist destination is in the middle of a three-phase 100th anniversary grounds beautification project that has expanded the courtyard, improved the parking lot and installed new fencing and a sculpture of a cheese block.

"We wanted to make sure our facility was in top-notch shape" for the TCCA's 100th anniversary in 2009, said Susan Palmer, director of retail operations at the association. "It's really important to us to make sure that our visitors have a really nice-looking grounds."

Palmer said that as the area's top tourist draw, the more inviting the Creamery is, the more likely visitors will stay in Tillamook, and then, she said, "everybody wins."

"I think if the business owners all pull together, including the Creamery, we can make Tillamook a really nice place to visit," she said.

### Fred Meyer

What might be an even more noticeable project is Fred Meyer's 30,000 square-foot expansion. Store manager Joe Herbert said that the project is already affecting the way locals and tourists view the town.

"Tillamook has always been kind of a pass-through town," Herbert said. But with the recent development, he said, motorists are starting to slow down and stop at businesses they see as they come up on the town from the north.

As a major shopping destination, the Fred Meyer renovation puts a shine on the rest of the town, he said.

"The locals really like it, and it shows them that their town is growing," he said. "I think people are realizing that the Tillamook area has a lot of things to offer. And that's great."

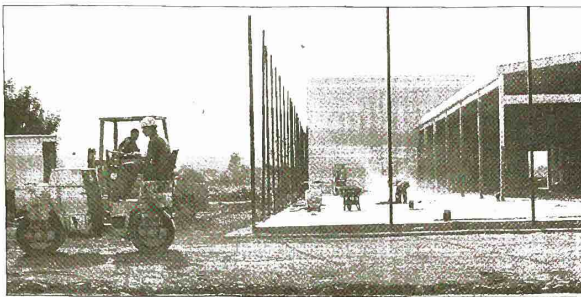
But Herbert said he was concerned about the message sent to tourists by the swaths of land along U.S. 101 that have been devastated by floods and remain muddy, vacant sites.

"As the tourist comes down, there's gaps," he said. "So what else can we do with some of those spaces? ... I think there's opportunity there."

### Building in the floodplain

City Manager Mark Gervasi agrees but said the process should involve a "community wide discussion" that may take about five years.

The city is hoping that Oregon Solutions, a lab organization devoted to finding solu-



In what will soon be one of the largest garden centers on the Oregon Coast, construction workers are readying the south end of Fred Meyer for its grand reopening in December, after a \$16 million renovation project.

tions through community input, will find an answer to the flooding problem. But the approximately 30 acres that the city has bought out from businesses are now deed-restricted to open space by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"We want to restore them with trees and landscaping, and have some (tear-down) businesses and make it look nice and meaningful," Gervasi said.

The city has gotten some interest in the spaces by mobile businesses such as coffee carts, he said, noting that the taco stand La Providencia and the Thursday Farmers' Market have been successful there.

"The unique challenge is that they're in a floodplain out there and we need to work and see if we can't find a solution to these problems," he said.

One person who has been made fully aware of the problems of building on a rising floodplain is Jon Cummings, owner of the Northport Plaza, which saw hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage after last November's flood.

A project to raise both buildings in the 12-unit shopping complex by 30 inches is now underway with funds from FEMA footing 75 percent of the bill.

Cummings noted, however, that he approached FEMA a year ago asking for help, but it didn't offer enough money then to raise the building and didn't offer any relocation assistance for the businesses in the plaza in a buy-out.

"We never really considered it because of our clients," Cum-

mings said. "It's just too good a place to give up to the water."

Cummings said he, too, is hoping that Oregon Solutions will find an answer.

"If Oregon Solutions makes some solutions, I see good things (for North Main)," he said. "Maybe then people won't have to jack their buildings up 30 inches to maintain their businesses down there."

In his work with the Tillamook Bay Habitat & Estuary Improvement District (TBHEID), Hurd said that as the county seat in an area with massive flooding, Tillamook has a responsibility to be a model for flood management.

"It's at a crossroad right now," Hurd said. "We didn't do anything, we haven't done anything since, and they're sure not doing anything now to improve the drainage."

Though some worried that new development on North Main Avenue would cause floodwaters to rise, like marbles overflowing a glass of water, Tilda Jones of TBHEID said FEMA requires engineers to ensure more water isn't displaced by the structures.

"It's controversial, but I feel the community is protected by FEMA no-rise certifications," she said, adding: "The floodplain is so huge that there aren't enough marbles to fill it up ... It takes a lot to make an impact."

### 'Up-and-coming community'

As the proprietor of the new complex housing Starbucks and Burger King, Gary Gilbert of Portland-based Atlas Investments said he's glad for the opportunity to build in Tillamook, which he called business-

friendly.

"When you get to work with a city like Tillamook, it's just a lot more fun," he said.

Gilbert said the investment firm is already working with other national brands to bring into what will eventually be a six-unit complex next to Fred Meyer.

"The Tillamook area is growing so rapidly right now," he said. "I have to think that when people see Fred Meyer expanding and Starbucks opening a state-of-the-art facility ... it shows that Tillamook is under-served for restaurant and retail companies."

"I feel like it makes Tillamook look like an up-and-coming community," he said.

