

New chapter for family-owned pharmacy

Linds weathers the economic storm by closing Langley store and expanding Freeland store

By Carolyn Tamler

SOUTH WHIDBEY ISLAND prides itself on having locally owned retail stores, rather than the big box corporate giants so prevalent elsewhere. A great example of this is Linds Pharmacy, which has had three stores on South Whidbey, beginning with a store that opened in Langley in 1970.

Over the years, the Linds added two pharmacies in other locations on South and Central Whidbey Island: one in the Payless Shopping Center in Freeland in 1995, and one across the street from Whidbey General Hospital in Coupeville in 2004.

As much as the owners loved the Langley location, the clientele and the Langley community, the economy was taking its toll on the business. It was the least profitable of the three stores. As they dealt with an increasing number of problems from the insurance industry and a slowing business (December 2008 was the worst December they had experienced in all their years in Langley), they began to evaluate their options.

The solution presented itself when Island Fabrics in Freeland closed its doors last year, and Ron Lind saw an opportunity to occupy the additional 4,800 square feet adjacent to the Linds store in the Payless Shopping Center. By moving into this space and shuttering the Langley store, Linds Pharmacy centralized operations and increased efficiency and profitability.

The Langley store closed on Friday, March 13, and the expanded Linds in Freeland opened the following Monday.

The 17,000-square-foot Freeland store includes expanded gift and home décor departments, plus the jewelry store relocated from Langley.

It was a tough decision, but the consolidation of the Langley and Freeland stores made sense for the health of the business and its ability to serve its customers. Linds Pharmacy can now use technology and automation to efficiently meet the needs of prescription customers, continue to expand the Linds Healthy Savings Plus program that delivers prescriptions and over-the-counter medications at affordable prices, and assist health professionals to assure that patients receive medications in a timely and convenient manner.

LINDS BEGINNINGS

Ron Lind was born and raised in Monroe and went to Washington State University for his training as a phar-



Linds' Freeland location expanded in March after the closing of the Langley store.

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macist. He met his wife Pam in the Bay Area, where she was working at the University of California. Ron says, "It truly was love at first sight."

Ron had gotten a job at a pharmacy in Issaquah, but he and Pam decided they wanted to settle in a more rural community. They looked into several communities in the Puget Sound area and found what they were looking for when they were able to purchase Lee's Langley Rexall Drug in what is now the Village Pizzeria in 1970. Ron had been familiar with Langley from his days as a high school athlete.

"I always loved taking the ferry to Whidbey Island," he recalls.

When they first purchased the pharmacy in Langley, they noticed there was a lot of land for sale in town, including a parcel across the street. They purchased that parcel shortly after taking over the Rexall Drug store. In just six months, they moved across the street to their 2,400-square-foot building that included an 1,800-square-foot apartment above the store. For 20 years, they lived above the store on First Street.

In the following years, there were other remodels and improvements. In 1982, another 3,500 square feet was added, with half the space devoted to a new jewelry store and half used for an expansion of giftware, health and beauty aids. In 1989, they added Langley Hallmark upstairs and moved to a home on Sandy Point in Langley. In the spring of 2001, one more expansion was completed when 3,000 square feet were added upstairs above Linds Jewelry to allow for a full-line toy store and a Hallmark gift shop.

ADDING NEW LOCATIONS

In 1994, Ron and Pam were asked by Jay Blaine, the owner-developer of the Payless Shopping Center in Freeland, to take over a pharmacy inside the Payless Grocery Store. Lind operated the pharmacy for three years. Then Blaine came to Lind and asked him if he wanted to take the pharmacy out of the grocery store and open a separate business in the shopping center. In 1997, the Linds moved into a new 12,000-square-foot

building in the shopping center and named it Linds Pharmacy. The same year, the business was incorporated as Saratoga Enterprises.

In 2004, Saratoga Enterprises purchased the Coupeville Pharmacy, across the street from Whidbey General Hospital, remodeled the building and expanded the pharmacy. They own some adjacent property, and Ron says they may expand the Linds Coupeville store at some point in the future.

THE STAFF AT LINDS

Linds is a family operation. Ron and wife Pam; son, Adam; and daughter-in-law, Shannon, work full time at Linds. Adam manages the overall front-end operation. Shannon is a pharmacy technician and a department manager. Daughter Onica is also a pharmacy technician and worked at Linds until she decided to stay home as a full-time mom to her six children. Grandchildren Hayden and Lyna are sales clerks in the store.



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Linds has developed a following on the island for its fine selection of gifts and jewelry.

Saratoga Enterprises is comprised of family and long-time employees. The corporation includes Ron and Pam, Adam and Shannon, and owner-employees Pat Koughan, Rod and Kathy Stallman, Jo Aernie and Lisa Knauer.

One of the most distinct elements of Linds is the jewelry store operation that was moved from Langley to Freeland. Koughan is a bench jeweler and the jewelry department manager.

Ron and Pam love to visit the annual Tucson Gem and Mineral Show and

look for exotic stones and colored minerals to bring back for Koughan to use. A large proportion of the jewelry sold at Linds is manufactured within the store.

"There is an excellent selection of interesting and affordable jewelry," Ron said.

The Stallmans manage the pharmacies. Lind said he is working to provide more affordable pharmaceuticals by starting a program that offers a 90-day supply of more than 400 generic drugs for \$9.99 per prescription. The program also allows a 10 percent discount on several generic and over-the-counter medications.

Knauer manages the cosmetics and costume jewelry departments, along with other front-end duties.

As merchandising and display manager, Aernie takes care of the display and décor of the stores.

Ron and Pam believe in doing what they can to help local business people. They try to obtain local products whenever possible, purchase from local craftsmen and pay attention to what the community wants.

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THE EXPANDED LINDS FREELAND

Ron and Pam enjoy having visitors to Linds Freeland store who notice the artistic elements that make a visit to Linds special. One of the most noticeable elements in the new section is the beautiful tigerwood floors.

On Ron and Pam's most recent trip to Tucson, Ron purchased several giant citrine crystals between one- and two-foot tall. They have been used to make spectacular lights for the store interior.

Langley architect Mike Boyd designed the exterior to match the rest of the shopping center. The interior design is by Oak Harbor designer Peggy Angell. The contractor was Leroy Olsen.

Several South Whidbey craftsman were involved in the new store, including: Mike Strevel, framing and carpentry; Les Asplund, interior finishes and fixtures with assistance from Randy Scofield; and Matt Armstrong of Whidbey Island Electric providing the electrical work.

“These may be the worst of times for many of us in business, but we’re moving ahead with careful planning, hard work and optimism.”

Ron Lind,
Linds Pharmacy

LINDS FUTURE

It was with great sadness that Ron and Pam closed the doors on the Langley store. That sadness was echoed by many in the community. For now, the building is for sale or lease. They have hopes that when the economy turns around, they may be able to return to Langley and open a store there again.

In the meantime, they are planning to maintain their energy, enthusiasm and involvement in the community.



Linds' ownership group, Saratoga Enterprises, is comprised of (L-R) Rod Stallman, Kathy Stallman, Jo Aernie, Ron Lind, Pam Lind, Shannon Lind, Adam Lind, Lisa Knauer and Pat Koughan.

They want their employees to feel they are members of a team. And, they want the South Whidbey Island community to know they are committed to providing the best pharmacy service

and best gift selection possible.

Ron adds, “These may be the worst of times for many of us in business, but we’re moving ahead with careful planning, hard work and optimism.” ■

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