

Still game for adventure, owners of British pub on First St. look to retire

By **MICHAEL WHITNEY**

SNOHOMISH — The tale of Piccadilly Circus Pub is part determination, part popular watering hole and certainly part love story.

But for Geoff and Marion Wall, they are looking to let someone else write the next chapter after 30 years in the business.

"I'm 79, she's 75. As much as I love it, there's a time you've got to say (expletive) it, it's time to retire," Geoff said.

They'd like to sell to the first person with the right offer.

If nothing happens, they'll keep going, the Englishman from Manchester said.

"We'll just take more vacations," Geoff says, pausing. "Right, 'Smurfy?'" calling Marion by her nickname.

Throughout his time in Snohomish, Geoff Wall hasn't been afraid to stand up on issues.

Ask former city manager Bill McDonald from 20 years ago. Wall says he dumped sidewalk garbage on the city manager's desk to make a

point First Street needed sweeping more frequently.

Ask KIRO Radio pundit Dave Ross. When he disparaged British food, Wall said he challenged him to come eat. Ross became an occasional patron since.

He's fought the "British food is blah" reputation for years. It's changed over time, he said. His European menu developed from being taught by two top chefs: Wolfgang Gruetzmacher for German food and Philippe Magnon for French food.

Piccadilly started as a gift shop sort of on a lark. Geoff said he grabbed a few items from his home, picked up a few others, and they opened shop on Glen Avenue. That was 1990.

"We were young and innocent then, huh?" Geoff beckons to Marion. "Yeah," she laughs back.

Within five months, the shop was pulling \$20,000 a month, Geoff said.

A year later, Piccadilly moved to its current home at 1104 First St. as a British gift shop and restaurant. A

six-month remodel in 2005 turned the front end into the pub. (Painted green and lined with wood, before then the old walls happened to be dusty pink.)

It's got regulars. One family holds their Christmas get-togethers at the restaurant annually. The night crowd knows Pic's has karaoke.

The sportsman's resilience built up from his formative years growing up in bomb-shelled, postwar England.

The soccer scarves tacked to the walls aren't just for the atmosphere.

At 17, he signed onto a team in England's top soccer league, the era's equivalent to the Premier League. And that team was the Blackburn Rovers, which was experiencing a gilded time during the late 1950s and early '60s. He played in a few games; the Rovers' regular starting roster was full. It was tough getting in to begin with, Wall noted.

At age 22, his career got cut short by injury.

Geoff immigrated to America in 1963 and unexpectedly got drafted into the U.S.



Michael Whitney photo

Geoff and Marion Wall opened shop in Snohomish some 30 years ago. Here, they stand for a photo outside Piccadilly Circus on First Street in late March.

military. Based at Fort Lewis, he played on the military's soccer team abroad. More soccer, and work in soccer coaching, helped serve his passion. His youth teams won championships.

"Soccer is 90 percent of my life, outside of work," Geoff said.

During an interview, he sometimes gauged dates by benchmarking them against the FIFA World Cup that hap-

pens once every four years.

One of Geoff's three sons, also named Geoff Wall, played in America's pro leagues.

"I taught him, but he's better than me," the dad said. If Piccadilly does sell, the Walls would like to move to Arizona.

In other First Street news:

• Faded Elegance, a mainstay on First Street that survived the Recession, closed

March 28 because of a lease change.

Owner Kim McIlrath said she hopes to reopen somewhere in Snohomish if space becomes available on First Street.

Inside the shop, visitors streamed in last month before Gov. Jay Inslee's stay-at-home order. Many lamented that it is going away.

She said it wasn't her business decision to close, but she is thankful for the community's support. "We're going out on a positive note," she said.

McIlrath opened Faded Elegance 20 years ago on Hewitt Avenue in Everett before moving to First Street in the mid-2000s.

• Earlier this year, Troy-Beck Antiques moved to a new space at 1015 First St. from its longtime home at the corner of Avenue A and First Street. The old corner shop was being cleared by a construction crew late last month.

• Peeking inside the former home of Past Gas & Pegasus Shops at 1003 First St., a reporter saw it is all cleared out.