

Landmark Home Made Cafe will not reopen

Co-owners say business will reemerge as wine bar

BY BOB SMITH
Kitsap News Group

PORT ORCHARD— Port Orchard's landmark Home Made Cafe is no more.

Restaurant owners Suanne Martin Smith and Paul Robinson said in a Facebook statement posted Monday that they will not be reopening their restaurant that's housed in a converted church after nine years of operation.

"It's with a heavy heart to announce the Home Made Cafe will not be reopening," the co-owners wrote. "We have decided as a family that it's time for us to end this chapter of our lives. We have had nine years serving our community, we raised our blended family of five kids here, and we have watched your beautiful children grow from babies to young adults."

The couple stated that the last couple of years have been difficult, both for the business and for them personally. "It's time for a new beginning. Thank you to all of our sup-



Bob Smith | Independent

Co-owners Suanne Martin Smith (left, pictured with restaurant manager Jeri Garcia) and Paul Robinson say they will not reopen their landmark Home Made Cafe restaurant in Port Orchard. It instead will reemerge as a wine bar inside its converted church building space.

porters throughout the years. Change is coming for all of us," they wrote.

Martin Smith and Robinson said after some remodeling work is completed at the former restaurant on the hill across from Port Orchard's

City Hall, they will reopen the space as a wine bar. The couple said they will serve "delicious small plates, beer, hard cider, wine and champagne" instead of breakfast and lunch items.

The co-owners said more

details will soon be forthcoming about their new venture. Martin Smith wasn't immediately available for comment Tuesday morning.

The restaurant's closure comes as the COVID-19 pandemic slowly ebbs locally and



nationally. Home Made Cafe has struggled during the past few years to survive a drop-off in business and to cope with state-mandated operational restrictions and closures related to the pandemic.

In March 2020, Martin Smith spoke to Kitsap News Group about their difficulties in surviving the pandemic, including their struggle to keep their 10 employees on the payroll.

"My employees have families to care for," Martin Smith told the Port Orchard Independent. "I have children too."

The popular eatery has served an eclectic breakfast and lunch menu to South Kitsap diners since opening nine years ago. After the restaurant initially partially reopened last year, it made

do by offering customers a restricted menu of items for takeout.

The development is bittersweet for the owners, who worked hard to expand their customer base and update and refine their menu.

In 2017, the restaurateurs won a \$20,000 grant as the grand prize winner of the edg3 Fund small-business competition sponsored by Kitsap Bank. The edg3 Fund is a competition among small businesses in the region in recognizing entrepreneurs "dedicated to growing their communities economically, socially and environmentally."

The co-owners invested their award funds in revamping the restaurant's kitchen area to include a new commercial cooktop, an expanded pantry and a walk-in freezer.

CHALLENGE

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Another modified approach some buyers take is to expand their search.

"We are finding that as housing becomes less affordable, or more scarce in areas, buyers are having to go a little further out to find something available that meets their budget.

"People that are maybe looking in Silverdale are now looking in Seabeck or towards Kingston or Suquamish. People looking in Port Orchard and Olalla may all of sudden be looking at Belfair or Allyn or Key Peninsula."

One approach that Miller discourages is the idea of purchasing a lot to build a home on.

"That is extremely difficult for a few reasons. The most desirable lots already have homes on them. People looking for land generally have to go further out to find it."

And even if a good lot is found, there could be significant obstacles to its use related to wetland or erosion zones that complicate permitting.

In addition, he notes, "It will be a challenge to find a builder. Because of so much new construction, finding a contractor and subcontractors available and willing to take on single-family homebuilding is hard because they all are doing large developments now."

Why so hot here?

Kitsap County is considered a hot real estate market. That's due in part to the pandemic, which had made many businesses realize that employees don't always need to come into the office, Miller said.

"That more people now have the ability to work from home has driven a significant number of buyers to Kitsap County."

Also, buyers get more bang for the buck in the Kitsap Peninsula and the life it offers is attractive to families, he added.

"Buyers want to come to an area where they get more house and land for the money. They can find views here they could never afford in Bellevue, Seattle or Tacoma — at much more affordable price point in Kitsap County."

Sheriff's deputy cleared of wrongdoing in overpass shooting

David Pruitte was fatally shot when deputies believed man was reaching for weapon

BY MIKE DE FELICE
Special to the Independent

PORT ORCHARD – Kitsap County Sheriff's Deputy Andrew Hren, a five-year veteran of the agency, has been cleared of criminal wrongdoing in the August 2020 shooting death of unarmed David J. Pruitte on a South Kitsap highway overpass.

Kitsap County Prosecutor Chad Enright's said Tuesday his office's review of an investigation by the Kitsap Critical Incident Response Team (KCIRT) determined that "deadly force used by Deputy Hren was permissible under the law."

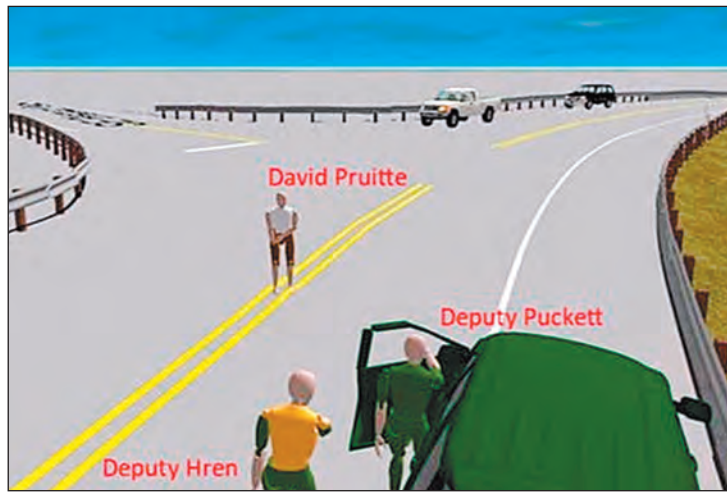
Based on the manner in which Pruitte was charging deputies, Hren, who fatally shot the man, reasonably believed Pruitte was armed and that he and a fellow deputy's life were in danger at the time of the fatal shooting, according to Enright.

There was no police body camera footage of the incident because the sheriff's office deputies are not fitted with the equipment.

The findings from the criminal investigation mean that Hren will not face criminal charges. The incident now will be reviewed by the sheriff's office to determine if the deputies violated any policies during the incident.

"I have reviewed the Kitsap County prosecutor's opinion and I appreciate the review found no criminal culpability by our deputies," Sheriff John Gese said. "This was a tragic incident, and the loss of life has had profound impacts. My thoughts go out to everyone who was affected by the events that occurred."

"The Kitsap County Sheriff's Office is committed to providing appropriate training and policies, and our training protocols are constantly being updated," Gese said. "New methods have already been



KCIRT illustration

This computer-generated illustration demonstrates where David Pruitte was standing just before he was shot by Kitsap County Sheriff's Deputy Andrew Hren.

introduced to further de-escalate incidents with people in crisis."

Independent investigation

KCIRT conducted an independent investigation into the circumstances of Pruitte's death. The group is a regional investigating team consisting of detectives from several law enforcement agencies in and around Kitsap County.

In this case, KCIRT did not include any representatives of the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office in its investigation. The Bremerton Police Department was the lead agency in the review. The KCIRT team included two non-law enforcement community representatives.

At 7:23 p.m. on Aug. 4, 2020, Hren responded with other deputies to the State Highway 16 overpass at Bethel Burley Road Southeast near Bielmeier Road concerning a call made by witnesses who were concerned about a suicidal man sitting on the overpass with his feet dangling over SR 16, according to a sheriff's office statement.

Deputies Hren and Joshua Puckett were the first law enforcement officials to respond to the scene, the prosecutor's report stated. Several civilian witnesses reported

that Pruitte quickly approached the deputies and appeared to be reaching for an object in his pants. The witnesses later told investigators they believed the object was a weapon.

Hren and Puckett also made statements in which they believed Mr. Pruitte had a weapon. Witnesses confirmed that the two deputies commanded Pruitte to stop his approach and show his hands, but that the 36-year-old man continued toward the deputies. At that point, Pruitte was shot by Hren as he approached the front of the deputies' patrol vehicles, according to the prosecutor.

The investigation found that Pruitte was unarmed at the time he was killed. The entire confrontation from the point deputies arrived until the time when Pruitte was shot, was approximately 30 seconds, the prosecutor's report stated.

An autopsy performed by Dr. Lindsey Harle of the Kitsap County Coroner's Office indicated that Pruitte had a total of five gunshot wounds. The cause of death was determined to be from a gunshot wound to the chest, according to Enright's report.

Conflicting witness statements

Enright's 15-page report indicated there were conflicting witness statements about how Pruitte behaved after deputies arrived.

Five witnesses told authorities they believed Pruitte was armed with a gun or another weapon. Despite their similar recollections, witnesses reported observing differing actions by Pruitte, according to the report. One witness reported seeing the subject lift his shirt and reach into his waistband. Two others said they saw Pruitte with his arms at his side and did not see him reach for anything. Two others told investigators his right hand was in his pocket.

Despite discrepancies in the witness statements, the prosecutor's report identified a common theme voiced by all the witnesses, who described Pruitte as acting as if he had a weapon and was charging toward the deputies.

"The statements from these witnesses would support the conclusion that Deputy Hren's belief that Pruitte was armed was objectively reasonable given the manner in which Pruitte charged towards the deputies," the report said.

"Problematic" talk

Shortly after the shooting, deputies Hren and Puckett spoke together prior to making statements about the incident. The prosecutor indicated that the two deputies' decision to talk with each other was "problematic."

"The mere fact that they spoke to one another shortly after the incident will cause some in the community to question the independence of their statements," the report said.

Gese said the conversation the KCSO deputies had with each other prior to being interviewed ultimately proved to be inconsequential. Still, he added, member agencies of the KCIRT team immediately revised policies to restrict such conversations between involved officers in the future.

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