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Striking a balance

New Buda Grocery owners hope to blend old and new

BY JEN BIUNDO

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Rusty and Madelyn Uresti will tell you that they have a soft spot for old things: Restored classic cars. Graceful historic homes. And in this particular case, old general stores.

Last week, the Urestis bought Buda Grocery and Market, the store built almost a century ago on the corner of Peach and Main Streets in Buda. And though they've changed the name to Buda Grocery and Grill and the renovation work is already underway, the couple plan to keep the store just the way they like it—true to its historic past.

The store hasn't changed much in the last half-century, except maybe the covers on the cereal boxes, Rusty Uresti mused. The Urestis say they're now trying to strike a balance between improvement and preservation.

"We want to preserve it and keep the historic feel," Madelyn Uresti said.

The Urestis purchased the Buda Grocery business inventory from former owner Jim Saadeh, and are leasing the building, with plans to buy the property in three years.

They're repairing the original wood floors, pressure washing the exterior and cleaning the pressed tin ceiling tiles. The restaurant area is getting expanded, with a new hand-made bar at the lunch counter. In a mix of old and new, historic photos of Buda will share the wall with two new plasma screen satellite televisions.

"A lot of people are happy there's some TLC being put into it," Madelyn Uresti said.

The Urestis want to focus more on the restaurant portion of the business, and extend the kitchen hours beyond the current closing time of 2 p.m.

"There's a major kitchen that's only been utilized for breakfast tacos and a light lunch menu," Rusty Uresti said.

They've found a way to indulge in their love of old vehicles. Every Saturday, anyone who drives up in a classic car—designated as a vehicle 25 years or older—will get a free hamburger.

The Urestis will hone the restaurant menu, adding choices like nachos and wings while keeping the popular items like breakfast tacos, migas and carne guisada. The lunch counter will take on the role of an old-fashioned soda fountain, with hand-scooped Blue Bell ice cream, smoothies and chai tea. And they're looking into the possibility of getting licensed to serve beer and wine.

"It's definitely been requested by more than 95 percent of the people that walk in here," Rusty Uresti said.

The couple hopes to add a few more upscale options to the grocery section, such as some higher-end and local beers and wine.

Long-time clerk Mike Davis will stay on at the store.

The Urestis are both native south Austinites who now live on Cedar Street in old town Buda.

Rusty Uresti was a college athlete who went on to play minor league baseball with the Atlanta Braves as a pitcher and catcher, and then pitched in the Mexican Baseball League. After his retirement from professional sports, he managed car dealerships, then owned a day care business with his wife.

In 2001, the couple opened Ruby Ranch Lodge in Buda, a venue for events like weddings, corporate retreats and reunions. They plan to maintain that business.

Because Buda Grocery has been a local icon for the last six decades, many customers are glad the store is being restored and maintained—though a few others have requested that it be transformed into a bar and music hall.

"You get all these different inputs from all these people that walk in," Rusty Uresti said.

The couple hopes that the improvements they put into Buda Grocery will have positive ramifications for other businesses on Main Street.

"It'll get better for everyone down the line, up and down the street," Rusty Uresti said.



PHOTOS BY JEN BIUNDO

Rusty and Madelyn Uresti, owners of the Ruby Ranch Lodge, have purchased the historic Buda Grocery and Market.

The History of the Buda Grocery Store

The store now known as Buda Grocery and Grill started its life as Cleveland General Store.

In 1881, town founder Cornelia Trimble laid out the lots for Buda, then known as Du Pre. The next year, Trimble sold four lots to one Charles Daniel for \$300; Daniel sold the lots to James Chandler. Chandler then sold one of the lots to Billy Goforth, stipulating in the deed that "if intoxicating liquors are sold or given away on the property" the land would revert back to him.

In 1893, Goforth built a graceful home on the corner of Peach and Main Streets, and six years later he sold it to Dent Talley, Buda's first peace officer.

The family of E.J. Cleveland moved into the house in 1907. Cleveland had been manager of the successful Goforth General Store, and was hired to run Buda Mercantile Company in the stone building that now houses the 1898 store. But he decided to go into business for himself. He bought the property on Peach and Main Streets and had the house moved over to Prairie Street east of the railroad tracks.

In 1913, he built a fine shop on the lot where the house had stood and named it E.J. Cleveland General Store. He sold groceries, dry goods, harnesses and farm machinery, as well as life and property insurance.

In the early 1900s, cotton was king in Buda, and Cleveland quickly diversified his business. He sold cotton seed on credit, taking his payment when the crop came in. Soon he was buying and selling cotton, and making a good living from it. But the devastating drought of 1925 effectively sounded a death knell for cotton farming in Buda. The local economy shifted to dairy farming, and Cleveland shuttered his store not long after.

In the next two decades a number of businessmen put out their shingle there, including a tractor store, hardware store, implement shop and wool buying business.

In the 1940s, Alma and Ira Stacey bought the old Cleveland General Store. Along with their daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Gerald Montague, they changed the name to Buda Grocery and Market, a name that would last until 2009.



PHOTO BY JEN BIUNDO

Longtime Buda Grocery clerk Mike Davis and one of his fans, Annelies West, 7, pose behind the counter. Davis will stay on with the new owners.



PHOTO BY DAVID WHITE

Gerald Montague reads the Free Press off the rack in his store back in 1993.

The Montagues remodeled the store in 1955 but left intact original features, such as the hardwood floors and pressed tin ceiling tiles.

They ran the grocery for half a century, becoming fixtures in the community. Gerald Montague served as school board trustee, volunteer fire chief and councilmember.

In 1997, when Mary was 75 and Gerald was 74, they finally sold to Austinites Steve Wright and Terry Delooze. In 2006, Austin resident Jim Saadeh bought the building. Rusty and Madelyn Uresti purchased the business inventory last week.



PHOTO BY JEN BIUNDO

Carpenter Mark Norris, left, and assistant Caril Roberts, right, are installing new woodwork and expanding the restaurant area. Original elements of the century-old building, such as the wood floors and pressed tin ceiling tiles, will be left intact.

Trying times calls for innovation



In our current economic situation some will despair in the grayness that lingers. Still others will just succumb to the bleakness that seems to be surrounding us at every turn. We all have heard of a friend, colleague, or acquaintance who has been displaced from their job. Yes, these times are very rough for lots of Americans that had nothing to do with the economic situation that exists today. For most, the reality is that:

- It is easier to start a new business in positive economic times.

- It seems within reason to get additional training for staff when the bank account is full.

- It is smart to outpace competitors by advertising in growing markets.

These are just a few examples of the road most people travel. Many go down this path and are successful when times are prosperous. Far fewer take the risk and follow these principals during an economic downturn. Let it be known, that the path to success is never without some risk.

It is important now more than ever to look to our past as we create a new future. Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls" in the opening line from the first of a series of pamphlets that he began writing in December 1776. Titled "The American Crisis," these pamphlets referred to what was the start of the American Revolutionary War. His words ring true today more than ever. Today, at this very moment each of us must begin to take personal responsibility for the daily management of our finances. Those who came before us are comforted by the assurance that we will pass our blessings to our children. Each of us must work quicker, smarter, and with more innovation than ever before. Here are a few ways how:

You can gain market share by building relationships within networking opportunities the Kyle Area Chamber of Commerce and its hundreds of business contacts can provide you.

You will have the edge to make better decisions when you attend Kyle Chamber functions and trainings before the economic situation improves. This will put you ahead of the game when things begin to fair better and "the rough economic times" are mentioned only when referring to the past.

You can lead the way when you take an educated and innovative approach to creating a new business or reorganizing your current business. Take it one step further with free one-on-one business counseling from the Small Business Development Center, taking place at the Kyle Chamber offices the second Tuesday of each month.

The city of Kyle is a shining star in a variety of areas, including economic development, that many communities would love to have. We currently enjoy an April 2009 increase in sales tax revenue of 23.96 percent. We must not allow the temporary bleakness of the moment to diminish

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