

**THE END OF AN ERA**

**WATKINS CITY COUNCIL: PART 1**  
**City wants properties cleaned up**

By Ellarry Prentice

The City of Watkins wants three properties cleaned up, including one that has been an ongoing source of frustration for the city council and neighboring property owners.

After hearing from concerned neighbors at its meeting on Thursday, July 11, the Watkins City Council approved asking the city attorney to take an "aggressive" approach be taken to address multiple violations at a property on the south side of Central Avenue.

Additionally, the council approved sending letters to two other residents to inform them that their properties – on First Street and the corner of Meeker Avenue and Co. Rd. 2 – are in violation of the city's blight ordinance. One of the properties has overgrown hedges that are impeding on adjacent property, and the other is cluttered and neglected.

The city has sent multiple letters to the owner of the property at 230 Central Ave. S., requesting that repairs be made to the home to comply with city standards. The issue has been ongoing for years, with the property owner making little effort to complete the repairs, according to council members and neighbors. A few months ago, it appeared the property owner was residing in the house, but work ceased soon after it began. Between written notices, the council agreed they gave the owner a more than sufficient time to complete the repairs, which include roofing and siding.

**Frustrated neighbors plead for resolution**

Shawn and Julie Erickson, neighbors to the Diffney property, told the council that living conditions there continue to worsen, and they're having a negative impact on multiple lives. The couple said it's been a problem for over three years.

Shawn said dog feces is all over the property, and very close to their property. "The smell is horrendous," he said.

"It's disgusting. I just don't understand why they aren't made to clean it up," Julie said.

Julie said they keep hearing that the repairs/cleanup is going to be done, but it ever is. "We keep hearing, 'Ya, we're gonna fix it.' And you don't live behind it," she said. They also mentioned that the property owner was never fined for failure to complete the work.

"They started the work, all right. They put up about five pieces of siding, because they know how to play the game with you guys," Shawn said.

The stucco on the house is "engulfed in black mold," Shawn said. "Rather than do anything with it, he just puts boards over it. ...Now you've got a home that's infested with black mold, and it's locked in. You've got a health concern."

"I can believe that...for as long as that roof stood open," Mayor Frank Eder said.

"The question is, what can be done?" Shawn said. "I can't imagine that the conditions for them are even remotely safe for them, let alone us residents that live close to them."

"Absolutely agree with ya," said councilor Marc Wurz.

The city has pursued action in terms of structural repairs, but Wurz agreed that the property poses a bigger threat in terms of health and safety.

"We have to take it to the next step," Eder said, adding that they can't continue to send written notices, giving him 30 days, and expect to be pacified with false promises that the work was going to be completed. "We can't trust that he's going to do it," he said.

"We need to defer it back to the city attorney and tell him to take the most aggressive path forward," Wurz said. "You're frustrated, but you're also looking at five very frustrated people," he said.

"He's gotta get that done," said councilor Tootz Tschumperlin. "And not just one piece of siding, either."



Photos by Ellarry Prentice

Several of these guys have enjoyed morning coffee at Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop "since the beginning." Just before the store closed, they made co-owners Tom and Kathy Inselman a sign that read "Thanks for the Memories." Pictured at 8 a.m. coffee are (front) Gary Scheierl, Mike Haag, and Bud Binsfeld; (back) Al Mueller, Kenny Ruhland, Dave Topp, Fritz Theis, Jerome Ludwig, and John Fleischhacker. Ugly Tom's closed on Saturday, July 13, after 35 years in business.

**Patrons, staff say farewell to Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop**

*After 35 years in business, Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop closes*

By Ellarry Prentice

"Thanks For The Memories." Tom and Kathy Inselman had a surprise waiting for them when they returned from a trip out of town last week. After sipping their final cup of joe at Ugly Tom's, the 8 a.m. coffee crew left the Inselmans with that message, written on the back of a store poster. The guys signed it and displayed it on a wall inside the now-former Eden Valley convenience store on the corner of Highway 55 and Meeker Avenue.

They'll miss the coffee, the infamous breakfast sandwiches, and their "spot" by the window, where they've been shooting the breeze for decades. What they'll probably miss most, though, is giving co-owner Tom Inselman crap. "We were the counseling committee," said Mike Haag, laughing. "...Helped him understand retail," added Bud Binsfeld, also laughing.

Tom, known as "Ugly" around Eden Valley, always set the coffee-drinking "counselors" straight, saying, "You guys don't understand retail," when they humorously told him they could do a fine job running the store.

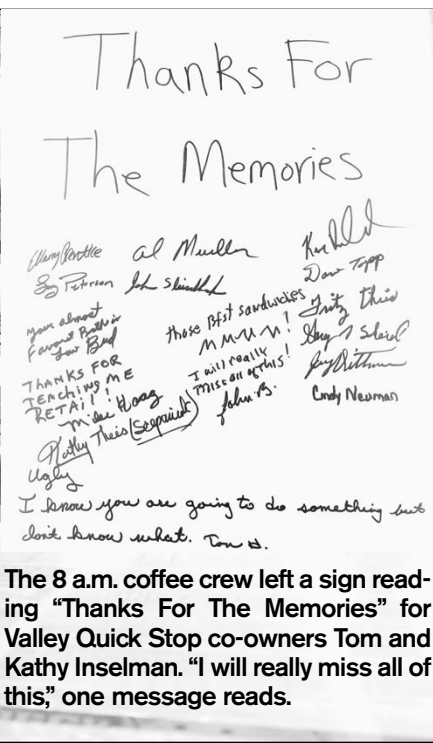
On the farewell sign, Haag wrote, "Thanks for teaching me retail!"

"We really don't need 'em. We can run it here ourselves," joked Fritz Theis of the "retail experience" they gained through countless hours of conversation inside the store.

As of Saturday, July 13, Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop has closed. A pillar in the Eden Valley community, the store had been in business for 35 years. Co-owned by the Inselmans and Schmidt's Stores, Valley Quick Stop has been sold to Jack's Companies. It will no longer be a gas station. Pumps will be removed soon, but plans for the building have not been disclosed.

Ugly Tom's "will be missed by a lot of people," Mueller said. "A lot of us have been coming here for years."

Some other messages on the "Thanks For The Memories" sign were "Those bfst. sand-



The 8 a.m. coffee crew left a sign reading "Thanks For The Memories" for Valley Quick Stop co-owners Tom and Kathy Inselman. "I will really miss all of this," one message reads.

Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop employee Stephanie Krugen greeted customers just hours before the store closed indefinitely on Saturday. Patrons made their final stop for homemade egg sandwiches, Valley Quick Stop's most popular item.



Chelsea Schott worked in the kitchen at Valley Quick Stop, where she prepared breakfast sandwiches, pizzas, subs, and more.

wiches, MMMN," and "I will really miss all of this."

Tom and Kathy Inselman purchased the site and original building on July 5, 1985. They lived in the back of the store until 1987, when they bought a home on Rice Lake. The original station was a small building with two gas pumps. It was torn down and a new, larger building constructed in its place. The new store opened in November 1990.

"Just want to thank the Inselman family for 35 years to this community," said patron and city council member Troy Huschle. "I'm sad to see it go. Congratulations on retirement to Tom and Kathy."

If you wanted to get the scoop about what was happening in Eden Valley, you could simply pull...the handle on the coffee machine and a stool up to the red and blue tables



Tom and Kathy Inselman opened Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop in July 1985. "It's kind of bittersweet 'cause we've met so many people. Our employees have been great, and our customers have been great to us," Tom said. "It's kind of a sweet, sad farewell," Kathy said.

inside Ugly Tom's. "Some people might call it BS, but we call it information sharing," Mueller said with a laugh.

"We're gonna miss the camaraderie here," Binsfeld said. "...And the free therapy," added Theis, smiling.

"We'll miss the egg sandwiches," said Kenny Ruhland. Those egg sandwiches were

Valley Quick Stop's most popular food item. Made with fresh eggs, meat, and cheese, they were an especially hot item during the store's final days, according to employee Stephanie Krugen. "Everyone's gonna miss 'em. You can't get them anywhere else. They're handmade," she said. "I've worked here for five

years. It was a really fun time working here. I got to know the town really well," said employee Chelsea Schott.

Krugen, who had worked at Ugly Tom's Valley Quick Stop for more than a year, said it was going to be hard to hang up her uniform. "It's just gonna be really sad, this place closin' up," she said.

**SCHOOL NEWS**

**Ashley Warren receives scholarship**

Ashley Warren of Watkins has been chosen as a recipient of a Milk and Dairy Product Scholarship from the National Dairy Shrine and Dairy Management, Inc. The scholarships are given to encourage students to pursue careers in dairy product or milk marketing, dairy product development, and/or quality control or similar roles in dairy and food industries.

Warren attends the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, where she is majoring in agricultural communications and marketing. At the U of M, she is secretary of the Gopher Dairy Club and president of the Beta of Clovia Sorority. She is active in Meeker County 4-H and Litchfield FFA activities. She plans to use her public speaking and communication skills to enter a career in agricultural marketing.

The daughter of John and Carol Warren, and a 2016 Litchfield High School graduate, Warren was one of 12 final recipients of Minnesota's Princess Kay of the Milky Way in 2017. Her family operates a third-generation dairy farm in rural Watkins on which they milk Holsteins and raise a variety of crops.

**COMMUNITY THANKS**

Thank you to those who donated blood at the Red Cross drive on July 10. Fifty-five units were collected. It was so nice to see so many familiar faces and great that so many of you made your own appointments.

With help from the community this drive was successful. Thank you to those who advertised the drive: EV-W Voice, Tri-County News, churches, marquee, local businesses, and radio stations. Thanks to St. Anthony Church for the use of the social hall and to the Lions and Social Concerns for donating the food for the canteen and the lunch for the Red Cross workers. Thank you to all the volunteers who worked taking down and setting back the social hall furniture, to those who worked at the registration desk and canteen, and to those who prepared and served the lunch.

All donors and volunteers made a difference in saving lives.

Two upcoming drives in Watkins are on Monday, Sept. 30, from 1 to 7 p.m. and Tuesday, Dec. 10, from 1 to 7 p.m.

Watkins Blood Drive Committee