



NEWS

BY BILL LIVICK, OREGON OBSERVER EDITOR
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Developer making things happen in Commercial Sector

Paul Lynch, of PLH & Associates LLC, gave up a consulting career to build homes and now develop retail properties in Oregon

Developer Paul Lynch, president of PLH & Associates, is on a mission to “help build a better” Oregon. The phrase is part of his company’s motto, but you get a strong sense it’s more than merely a slogan.

The motto “symbolizes everything we do,” Lynch says. “Really, I’m trying to run a Christian business.”

Lynch, who has three commercial developments in the works here, gave up a 15-year career as an information technology consultant two years ago and formed a limited liability company with a silent partner who shares his philosophy.

Lynch had been working as a project manager in software development for Fortune 500 companies like BP and Amoco for 10 years before establishing PLH & Associates. Before that, he worked on statewide IT systems for the Wisconsin Department of Administration doing “all sorts of website development stuff.”

Lynch and his wife (an attorney employed by the University of Wisconsin) arrived in Oregon about 10 years ago. They had decided to build a new home and happened upon a lot for sale next to the 12th hole at Foxboro Golf Course. With a ton of project management expertise but little real building experience, Lynch decided to be his own general contractor.

“We hooked up with a builder that allowed us to work with them, built that first house and really we weren’t going to build again,” Lynch remembered. “But some people came along and wanted to buy the house, so we said OK, let’s build another one then.”

Over the course of the next eight years, the Lynches built seven more homes in Oregon. The last one, on Medinah Street near the Bergamont development, is where Lynch and his wife have decided to settle with their two children, aged 6 and 9.

Lynch said overseeing the construction of his current home while continuing to work as a corporate consultant got to be too much. So, after years of thinking about it, he decided to change careers and form his own company. And rather than continue doing residential construction, Lynch turned his sights to commercial development.

“We started the company on Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday,” Lynch recalls. “We’d been talking about it and talking about it, but that’s when we decided hey, let’s just do this. And that’s when I left corporate America and we set up the company. It truly is about helping build better communities.”

Lynch, 42, said he looked around Oregon and realized the community was seriously in need of commercial infrastructure. As he was working on the last two homes he built on Medinah Street, “people would walk through the houses, a lot of them relocating families from bigger cities, saying the development’s great,” he recounted. “They’d say there’s a nice golf course and a great school system, this is a nice house, but the downtown – there’s no infrastructure. I was in the same boat. I grew up on the east side of Madison, where you have all those amenities, including a beautiful downtown to go to. We looked at the downtown here and thought maybe we should just focus our efforts on that.”

At about the same time, Chamber of Commerce executive director Linda Pollock informed Lynch that the former Old Stage property, behind BrouxNellie’s Diner, would soon be for sale. Before long, Lynch had purchased four properties in the area: three residential homes and the building that houses RX Automotive. Oregon public works director Mark Below owns a fourth house in the cluster of residential properties between the railroad tracks and BrouxNellie’s and has agreed to sell it to PLH & Associates.

BUILD Grant helps launch redevelopment

In early May, Lynch and the village applied for a downtown revitalization grant offered by the county. Dane County awarded the village a Better Urban Infill Development (BUILD) matching grant worth \$11,000 toward Lynch’s redevelopment plan, which involves the five properties on about 1.5 acres on Jefferson Street.

He said the grant creates a partnership between his company and the village.

“The grant allows the village to participate in this project with us,” Lynch said. “It basically is a continuation of a grant the village received a while back to do the downtown master plan. We want to make sure this project adheres to the master plan, and this grant allows us to do that.”

The master plan calls for a mix of residential and commercial development downtown. Lynch and village officials hired Vierbicher Associates Engineering to study and recommend the best options for PLH & Associates’ downtown properties. The village will use its grant to pay half of the \$22,000 cost of Vierbicher’s feasibility study; Lynch’s company will pay the other half.

“The study will look at the number of businesses we have here and what’s needed or what’s recommended,” Lynch explained. “It’ll also create a very conceptual site plan and help us through that first phase to make sure it conforms with that downtown master plan.”

Lynch said he hopes to begin work on the project in the next month or two. At the same time that his company is working on the Jefferson Street project, Lynch will look to build on a vacant lot he owns on Main Street between Pizza Pit and Weaver Auto Parts. “That lot is build-to-suit,” he said. “We’ll probably have commercial on the first floor and a

second floor could be residential.”

Janesville Street Commons

Not long after forming PLH & Associates and before setting his sights on downtown Oregon, Lynch began building phase one of the Janesville Street Commons, a 4,095 square-foot mall in the 900 block of Janesville Street. “We happened to see an ad in the paper for a pizza company looking to come into the community,” Lynch recalled. “It was Pizza Hut. They’d been looking for the last 20 years to come to town. When a lot became available down by Kwik Trip, we bought it, pitched them a plan and within 15 minutes they said they were in.”

The mall that now houses Pizza Hut and State Farm Insurance has a third space that will soon be rented, Lynch said, although he declined to name the business. “We have it rented and it will be a cool tenant,” he said. “They want to open the doors Dec. 15. They won’t be competing with anybody else in town.”

About a year ago, Lynch closed the deal on the former Melton Motors property next to the Janesville Street Commons Mall. He hired a demolition crew to tear down an old gas station and has gutted what used to be Melton Motors. A \$1.6 million reconstruction of the property is under way, with the goal of creating a 9,544 square-foot, two-story building. Lynch said the new building will stylistically match its next door neighbor: “It’s going to keep the same look and feel as the Pizza Hut.”

Half of the first floor will be home to Stoughton Hospital Rehabilitation Clinic, which will move from its Main Street location downtown. Another tenant space on the first floor will be available, as well as about half of the second floor, Lynch said.

“I’m thinking that half of that second floor is going to be my office,” he said. “We’ll need a showroom to display what we’re doing for downtown development.”

PLH & Associates has a third potentially big project in the works, with an accepted offer to purchase a 13,515 square-foot building at 845 Market Street that is presently owned by Woodward Communications Inc. and home of the Oregon Observer.

“That will be a \$1 million project. We’re looking to close sometime in late October,” Lynch said.

He plans to convert the building into a multi-use retail space, which will be occupied by Anytime Fitness (in a 6,000 square-foot space), Clean Gear of Wisconsin LLC., and another as-yet unnamed business.

Lynch went before the Planning Commission last month to give an overview of what he hopes to do with the building. Woodward Communications is relocating to Verona in October, but has also rented space downtown for an Oregon Observer office.

With a background in computer technology and creating and using software programs, spreadsheets and databases, Lynch is a developer for the 21st century. He said his IT experience has been a big asset in running his relatively new company. “I use a lot of technology in my business,” he said. “Soon I’m going to have video cameras linked to all

the sites so that I can sit here in my office and see what's going on. I won't have to go to the sites. I can manage it all from my computer right here."