

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, January 1, 2025 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

With the passing of the torch from one year to the next, Darb Huffman of Laughin' Gnome Pottery is retiring after 21 years of throwing, decorating, and inventing mugs and plates. Huffman has trained siblings Joey and Arthur Cannon in all of these arts for the last five years and is now handing the business over to them. Since 2004, with the start of Daily Bird Pottery, Huffman has been an artist and small business owner in the community, working to make a living. After 1,250 markets, moving 3 to 4 hundred pounds of pottery each time, and many, many mugs mailed, he and his partner, Francie Loveall, will be starting a "light duty" company selling Swarovski crystal pendants they call "sparklies" and cruising Vancouver Island to their heart's content.

Here's Huffman's gnomish advice you can put to use in the new year: "If you're an artist, find your niche and exploit it!" You may recognize Huffman as the gnome character he dresses up as at markets, which he created to help heal from his departure with the Daily Bird Pottery and served as a way to come into his own. It also became entertainment at markets. Huffman says it's his great joy to make arrangements for the Cannons to take over the business in a way the siblings can afford. The Cannons will inherit kilns, five wheels (Huffman's keeping one of each for himself), a large inventory, a renter's deposit and even some help paying rent for the first few months, as well as the skills to carry it all.

The business's new name will be Mud Wood Gnomes, and the Cannon siblings will still use gnome stamps on their wares. They will also pay a royalty to Huffman for the fidget therapy bead mugs. Huffman is excited about the change in generations, saying, "It's sad to see the way the older generations hold on without passing it to the next." Huffman will keep his website domain for administrative purposes, but you can find the new owners at www.mudwoodcottage.com.

In addition to the sale of the Laughing Gnome, this year's Water Street shuffle is in full swing. That dance of businesses both closing as well as changing ownership and locations on the maindrag of downtown Port Townsend already includes several empty retail spaces. The first blank opened up where Quimper Sound Records and Guitars had been before moving to Uptown, followed quickly by the close of Vespertine, Port Townsend's first adult store with a femme focus. Additionally, two other long-time businesses are also up for sale including the 40 year institution of Phoenix Rising and the almost as old Abracadabra.

When I last reported on the Water Street Shuffle, the Zee Tai Collective had just opened and now they're finding their footing inviting more and more artists to share the collective gallery and workspace. Kalma, another business, has continued growing their death-centered offerings allowing the community space to grieve and grow in the area they call The Parlor. And Pendragon's Labyrinth's Magical Mysterium club for arcane enthusiasts continues to add to its ranks. Who will move into downtown's empty spaces is yet to be seen, but as we ring in the New Year I'm hoping for some promising young entrepreneurs to continue the new energy.

If you're looking for some further reflections from 2024, you can also check out jeffcobeacon.com for our top five stories from the last year. It's been an honor to start this new local news outlet and offer this community's stories back to it, and the *Beacon* is grateful we get to partner with KPTZ to bring you our in-depth reporting and unique stories on the air every Wednesday.

My resolution? To do my best to tell the stories of you, your friends, and neighbors using both my heart and head to look for the truth.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.