

Mighty Tieton

Mighty Tieton Story

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THE PRIMARY GOAL OF MIGHTY TIETON is to build a community of successful artisan businesses in Tieton, Washington. Once in place, these light manufacturing and hospitality enterprises will help to revive the local economy, gain national recognition for creating and selling products of imaginative design and high quality, and distribute their products to national markets via conventional and unconventional means.

This venture will also help to build an identity for Tieton as a beautiful, interesting and pleasant destination for regional and national visitors. Mighty Tieton will develop residential and tourist accommodations and facilities for special commercial and cultural events.

MIGHTY TIETON LLC was formed in the summer of 2005 to develop the venture, to acquire key properties, to connect creative talent to its larger vision, and to facilitate development of the properties and businesses. Presently, the principal is Ed Marquand.

TIETON IS LOCATED at the far western edge of the Yakima Valley, 2000 feet above sea level. To the north, Mt. Clemens creates a striking backdrop. The heart of town is an attractive main square park, which storefronts face on all sides. National forest, state wildlife land, and other protected acreage border the local orchards. The Naches and Tieton Rivers are close by.

Surrounded by apple and pear orchards, Tieton's economy has been dependent on agriculture since its founding in the early 20th century. Various small scale farms, packing, and storage operations consolidated over the decades into large, modern agribusinesses. Organic and new hybrid orchards are developing in the area, which increases the diversity of produce and market opportunities.

Although very small, Tieton is a city with an elected mayor, city council, and professional management staff. It has a population of 1100, over half of whom are Hispanic. It has water and sewer systems, and recently installed a separate orchard irrigation system for yard watering and other non-potable uses.

Tieton is fifteen miles to the west of Yakima, the largest city in the valley. Yakima is a major transit and manufacturing center for central Washington. The Yakima Air Center is served by national and regional carriers. Tieton is four miles south of Highways 410 and 12, and 15 miles from Interstate 82. Seattle is a pleasant 2.5 hours drive from Tieton, and Portland is 3 hours away.

Recreation is plentiful and high quality. The Yakima area averages 280 days of sunshine per year. Summers are warm and dry. Fishing, hiking, horseback riding, rafting, camping, hunting, and bike riding are popular. Winters are typically cool with occasional snow. White Pass Ski Resort is a half hour from Tieton.

MIGHTY TIETON believes that the basic components are in place to support a small but impressive enterprise that can grow and eventually reverse the downward spiral of Tieton's economic base. This can be done by combining talents and entrepreneurial skills of some of the region's designers with local training, fabrication resources, and underutilized labor.

Northwest has abundant creative energy. Regional architects, graphic, interior, landscape, industrial and technology designers, artists, and craftspeople are widely recognized for their work. Many of them are looking for new ways to express their talents and ideas. The inspiration for many of the projects and products that will be produced in Tieton will come from these individuals. Several own successful businesses and are looking to expand and take on new professional opportunities.

There is no shortage of good formal training programs in the Yakima Valley through the Perry Technical Institute, Yakima Valley Community College, and small business apprentice programs. Central Washington University in Ellensburg is an hour away. Washington State University has a branch campus in Yakima, and Heritage University is also nearby.

In comparison to other areas of the region the economy of the Yakima Valley is considered depressed. Tieton's economy is agriculturally based. For most workers in the area the orchard work year is only four to six months long, so there is ample potential labor capacity.

Mighty Tieton will eventually require the skills of tradesmen. Boise Cascade and other timber businesses have closed logging and milling operations over the last decade, which has created another pool of potential employees for Might Tieton's ventures.

Local businesses are eligible for many tax break and training subsidy programs. Mighty Tieton has been working with the Yakima Valley Development Association to identify specific opportunities.

WHAT KINDS OF PRODUCTS WILL BE DEVELOPED AND PRODUCED? Mighty Tieton itself will eventually develop its own lines of branded products. However, the first manufacturing businesses will be independent companies. Marquand Books has recently opened a satellite office there. It will be producing high-end limited edition artist books, and handling storage and fulfillment of its direct sales. Initial plans are underway to put in an art paper manufacturing studio and letterpress shop. Ideas under discussion revolve around garden accessories and furniture, mosaic and enamel signage, statuary, fences, gates, and trellises. Other ideas under discussion are book shelving and library ladder systems, architectural façades and ornaments, and parquet flooring.

Mighty Tieton is encouraging designers to develop products that will "upcycle" local materials that are considered disposable, or are used for other local industries, and are available in abundance. These include fruit crate plywood, apple, cheery and pear wood from expired orchards, scrap metals, salvage from local logging, and obsolete farming equipment.

This approach of reusing simple and inexpensive materials to create high-end, high-visibility products with a distinctive design “edge” is a central theme. Mighty Tieton will encourage and support products that can be classified as “Green” or made from recycled materials.

RECREATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, “RETREAT” HOSPITALITY AND CULTURAL EVENTS Mighty Tieton will provide opportunities for businesses interested in developing unconventional hospitality and cultural events. These include lodging and event spaces for sports enthusiasts such as road and mountain bikers, skiers, rafters, hikers, birders and fly fishermen. Educational retreats and conferences will be invited to Tieton, including some on book arts, digital reproduction techniques, small design conferences, foreign language workshops, and writers’ retreats. Some of the spaces will be used for weddings, concerts, trade shows, and private receptions and dinners.

STAGING MIGHTY TIETON

At present, most of the designers and entrepreneurs who have expressed interest in this venture live outside the area. They need to spend time in Tieton to assess local resources.

The first major development is the Mighty Tieton Lofts. This fourteen unit studio/condominium project, are being offered to friends and colleagues who are most likely to contribute to the bigger venture.

Next, Mighty Tieton will develop a large warehouse into studios for woodworking, metalworking, mosaic and enameling prototyping and manufacturing. The warehouse will also be used as a business center, and will provide warehousing, fulfillment, shipping and receiving facilities. The business structure for this facility may involve co-op memberships, straight space rentals, or use leases.

The first formal business activity in this facility is book warehousing, shipping, and fulfillment for Marquand Books, Serindia Publications, and long term book storage for University of Washington Press, Serinda Editions, and other publishers. Eventually, this will occupy one-sixth of the space in the large warehouse.

Tieton has little to attract tourists right now. However, Mighty Tieton activity will eventually change that perception as the town becomes synonymous with smart design and imaginative events. In the coming years the town will support quality restaurants, shops, and lodging. The development of a pub, a distillery, and an updated version of a motor court are in planning stages.

Since it is not on a highway it has little drive-by visibility, which is part of its charm. Tieton will eventually become a destination for those who live in the area by hosting and sponsoring a variety of recreational and cultural events, including antique shows, bike races, birding events, craft bazaars, art exhibitions, community parties and concerts, and surprise installations of artwork by internationally recognized photographers and artists. Tieton has several seasonal community events each year, which Mighty Tieton will support and supplement with new activities.

The town is short of private event spaces so it loses wedding, quinceñeras, charity fundraisers, and prom business to other venues. There is a need for event spaces in the Upper Yakima Valley, so this is another opportunity for Mighty Tieton.

THE PROPERTIES

- **Mighty Tieton Condo Lofts:** This is a conversion of a 28,000 square foot canned fruit warehouse into fourteen live/work condominiums. Each unit will be 1440 square feet, consisting of two floors (720 square feet per floor), with heavy timber ceilings – fourteen feet on the upper floor and ten feet on the lower floor.
 - The award-winning Seattle architecture firm of Arellano/Christofides (www.arellano-christofides.com) is designing the project.
 - These will be sold as basic units, fully plumbed and wired, with bathroom fixtures and kitchen appliances and utilities in place. The designers will retain and emphasize the raw character of the building's original use and materials.
 - Buyers will be able to design and finish the units to suit their purposes.
 - The project includes a garden on the north side of the building for residents and special events.
 - Solar power will supplement on-grid electrical service.
- **Mighty Tieton Studios and Warehouse:** Next to the 'Lofts' is a 40,000 square foot warehouse. It includes a 12,000 square foot space once used for a fruit packing line, and five large, open, and heavily insulated rooms designed for controlled atmosphere fruit storage. Ceilings are 24 feet tall. There are two large staging rooms with 26 foot ceilings which will be kept flexible for manufacturing and cultural event space. In October 2006 it will host the Yakima Antiques Show, and exhibition of quilts, and concerts. In spring 2007, it will be the venue for Artist Trust of Washington's fundraiser and an arts festival.
- **Book Arts and Design Studio:** Facing the main square and park, the Book Arts Studio is a solid storefront with large windows and ample floor space. It is air conditioned and functions as the office for Marquand Books and a hand book bindery.
- **The Church:** Directly behind the Book Arts Studio is a church that will be converted this fall to an event and wedding venue with a catering kitchen. It should be able to accommodate approximately 100 people for weddings, retreats, small concerts, educational seminars, and professional training sessions. It will be wired for Wi-Fi and Power Point projection. The back will open to a large garden that connects to the main square park.
- **Other properties:** Mighty Tieton has acquired two additional buildings, three additional vacant lots, and a ten acre parcel, which will be developed as projects evolve.

MOTIVATIONS

Mighty Tieton is taking advantage of several trends evident in the Baby Boom generation, and applying them to available assets and materials in Tieton and the Yakima Valley. This will create a new model for creative thinking about economic forces that have hurt small rural agriculture communities, while giving successful and creative individuals an opportunity to apply their ideas and experience to local economic and social problems.

Creative professionals: By their inventive nature, artists and designers see opportunity in unusual places, materials, and circumstances. Many Boomer generation “creatives” have achieved a comfortable level of success in their professional lives, but feel that their daily routines have become less satisfying and more compromised – often as a result of their own specialization. They lack opportunities for experimental work or fresh directions in different forms and applications. For example, many architects would like to design furniture, and design accessories. Graphic designers who specialize in print work would like to explore traditional book arts or signage. Good amateur cooks consider opening commercial kitchen enterprises that would allow them and others in the area to bring specialty food products to market. Lacking equipment, space and the right context for these activities, these ambitions remain unrealized fantasies.

This trend parallels the Boomer generation’s urge to start another chapter in their professional lives before retirement. The self-help press often talks about “next steps,” when parents are freer from constraints of raising children. They have more time and money to explore personal creative challenges. This group is often motivated by an entrepreneurial drive, an urge to express a creative legacy, and an interest in doing social good, particularly in a community context.

Mighty Tieton is well connected to many in this group and will take advantage of their extensive network of successful friends and colleagues, its marketing savvy and public relations and merchandizing resources, its access to funding, and accumulated creative and business experience.

Although the Lofts will be used as second homes by some of the owners, Mighty Tieton is not trying to attract individuals who are primarily interested in vacation property; entrepreneurship of some kind is essential.

Creative teachers and supervisors: Yakima and Ellensburg are home to many talented artists and craftspeople. Professional outlets for most of them involve teaching and regional exhibitions and commissions. Although highly skilled, their opportunity for broader exposure is limited. They will be a key component to our venture.

Mighty Tieton plans to encourage these individuals to help set up the studios and training programs, and to assist in early stages of quality control and supervisions of the artisans. We expect some of them to develop their own ideas for products that would be produced in this environment.

Makers: Pumping more money through the local economy is important for Tieton, so most of the labor will be recruited from the local pool. The first businesses will start small and hire makers for occasional or contract work. Piece work at home is also a possibility. This will allow employers and managers to identify workers with special abilities and talents who will best fit

their needs. Eventually, Mighty Tieton hopes that the related business can increase part and full time employment to impressive levels.

Local government and businesses: Creating new jobs in a depressed county is attractive to the local government officials. The Yakima Valley Development Association has been supportive and helpful in outlining tax breaks, training assistance, PR ideas, and consulting assistance we would qualify for. The novelty of this concept is highly attractive to them because of its potential impact on the economy of the entire valley.

MARKETING AND SELLING MIGHTY TIETON PRODUCTS

Designing and manufacturing products is difficult enough. However, selling the products to a national public is even more so. Following are some of the methods businesses will use.

Web-based retail: The internet is changing the way consumers shop, and unusual products in limited quantities can attract buyers from anywhere. Of course, retaining higher margins for each item sold on through the web store allows margins to be higher. Many of the products will be one-of-a-kind so we will develop an e-commerce retail presence that can feature single products, and present them attractively.

The web retail store will be appealing and dynamic. It will use the town of Tieton as the showroom for the products. It needs to capture a sense of the town, its personality and quirks, and the broader concept.

National PR about Mighty Tieton and its activities will drive viewers to the site, and should capture their imaginations by making the experience fun, interesting, and addictive.

Wholesale: Some Northwest production businesses have successful retail operations and manufacture enough products to keep their retail customers satisfied. However, they often get requests for wholesale orders. They fill them when they can but priority is given to their retail sales. Mighty Tieton could be the ideal place for them to expand into wholesale for a selection of their most popular products. With Mighty Tieton's assistance they could manufacture, warehouse, pack, ship, and fulfill orders without slowing down their primary retail activity.

Brick-and-mortar retail: Eventually, Tieton's reputation will attract tourists in sufficient numbers to make retail shops viable.

NEXT STEPS

- The plans for the Lofts are in for final permit review and should get final approval in September.
- At least ten of the fourteen condos have been pre-sold to a select group of friends, associates, and colleagues who could contribute to the larger vision.
- The current schedule anticipates that the Lofts will be ready to occupy by early summer 2007.

WHAT IS MIGHTY TIETON LOOKING FOR?

- Mighty Tieton is an incubator. As such, it will help viable fledgling businesses get going in Tieton by offering affordable space, back office support, PR, and broader context for each enterprise.
- Self-starting and creative individuals and businesses that fit the demographic and share Mighty Tieton's vision, and who can invest time, energy, and money to get their own ventures going within the Mighty Tieton context.
- Capital to supplement construction of the Lofts.
- Entrepreneurs who can bring knowledge and experience in:
 - Web commerce and development
 - Warehousing and fulfillment
 - Property management and maintenance
 - Event coordination
 - Grant writing and business plan development
 - Public relations and media access
 - Business development and management
 - Back-office technology
 - Retail merchandising
 - Community development
 - "Green" industries and processes
 - Commercial kitchens
 - Hospitality

CAVEATS

- Mighty Tieton is not in a position to finance most businesses, but will help locate support when possible.
- Mighty Tieton has excellent relations with the government representatives, local business owners, and its neighbors, and it is important that we maintain them.
- Tieton is a small town that takes pride in its setting, history and potential. It is not looking for a "make-over."
- Enterprises developing in Tieton need to be sensitive to the local culture and traditions of this orchard community and to respect a wide range of political and social points of view.

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