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Make Grand Valley grand again?: Oldest building in town set for new life

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The oldest standing building in Grand Valley is getting a new life as a restaurant, bakery and ice cream shop. Local resident Joshua Tuck is working to transform the historic 1870 structure into a new community gathering place.

The project, called OG 1870, aims to blend the town's deep roots with a fresh sense of energy and tourism potential. Located across from the site of Canada's first GM dealership, the building was built in 1870. It has long served as an inn and restaurant in various forms but sat vacant in recent years before Tuck and his family stepped in to restore it.

?Since moving to Grand Valley, I have more friends and more support in this community than I ever had in my whole life ? it just feels like home,? he said. ?I want to do something in return. I would like to help make Grand Valley grand again.?

When completed, the space will feature a breakfast diner, bakery and ice cream parlour under one roof, while also serving as a tribute to Grand Valley's history through historic displays, murals and memorabilia connected to its past.

For Tuck, the project is about more than opening a business. After moving to Grand Valley a few years ago, he said the welcoming atmosphere and strong sense of community convinced him and his family to put down roots permanently.

?I've only lived here for a short couple of years, and I love it so much,? he said. ?It gives me such a strong feeling of belonging? It's the best place I've ever been, honestly. There is something about this little place called Grand Valley that just makes me want to stay here forever and put the roots in. That's why we bought this restaurant.?

He saw the town as a place with untapped potential ? one that could become a destination similar to communities like Elora or Hockley Valley, where visitors are drawn by history, charm and local experiences.

That vision pushed the family into an ambitious undertaking. Tuck and his wife took possession of the building just one day after the birth of their son and immediately began renovation work, often putting in 14-hour days to prepare for an early summer opening.

Despite the scale of the restoration, much of the work has been completed with the help of local residents and volunteers.

Tuck assembled a small but determined crew made up of tradespeople, retirees and residents who wanted to help bring the building back to life. Friends, neighbours and local supporters have regularly stopped in to assist with cleaning, construction and organizing as excitement around the project continues to grow.

?Our crew to build this place is made up of myself, and then one other guy who is a part time contractor approached me as I started to work on it and wanted to help,? he said. ?I had two other gentlemen come in off the street, a retired gentleman, one man from Trinidad? He's 67 years old? And another... a Polish man who is 71 and also retired.?

He said to Tuck, ?Hey, listen, we want to help you. We want to work. We're not concerned about the money.?

Tuck said, ?It's been a very community focused project.?

He believes the revitalization effort could encourage more tourism, attract new businesses and inspire further investment in the downtown core.

By preserving one of Grand Valley's oldest landmarks while creating something new for residents and visitors alike, he hopes the project will remind people what makes small-town communities special.

?We wanted to create something new and exciting for the town,? Tuck said. ?We want to set a standard of what's possible, because we believe that if we can create one successful business like this? then there's a lot of opportunity for other people within the community to do the same.?

?I think that ultimately it will increase people's standard of living and their property values, and say, ?I'm from Grand Valley' with pride. This is Grand Valley, and there's no reason everybody shouldn't know how grand it is.?

As renovations continue and plans move toward an official opening later this summer, Tuck said he hopes OG 1870 will become more than just a place to eat.

By combining local history, community spirit and a welcoming small-town atmosphere, he believes the project can help spark a new chapter for Grand Valley ? one that encourages residents to take pride in their hometown while giving visitors a reason to stop, explore and keep coming back.

The business is expected to begin opening in phases this summer, with the ice cream operation anticipated to launch first.