

Clark Family Determined to Rebuild After Hardware Store Destroyed by Fire

BY REID IFORD, TUALATIN LIFE

At 2:30 am on Sunday, July 31, Clark Lumber and True Value Hardware went up in flames. Though firefighters responded only minutes after the call, the contents of the store fueled the blaze and it burned on. Upon arrival, it was all they could do to contain the fire.

The family owned business sat on a two acre plot, nestled in the heart of Tualatin. After 51 years, the city landmark was reduced to nothing but ashes and smoldering remnants of a well-established history.

Since 1965, Clark Lumber stood strong throughout countless trials, including a flood and an always changing economy. It was a family owned establishment from the start, making it even more unique to the community. Unfortunately for the Clarks, the great inferno took down this beloved family business. But this is only temporary.



Harvey Clark

Business owner Harvey Clark admits he was completely overwhelmed when he drove into Tualatin and saw the family business of 51 years ablaze.

"I was, I don't know, I was in shock," he says, remembering that moment. "I came down Tualatin-Sherwood Highway, and saw the flames. I couldn't believe it. I drove on by without stopping. 'Where are all those flames coming from?'" he asked himself, unable to accept what was laid out before his eyes.

"It's been our life for 50 years."

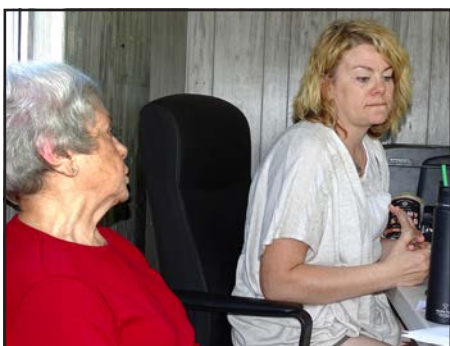
"He called me at 3 AM. He said, 'the store is gone,'" recalls Clark's daughter Stacy Sherwood, who has been employed at the lumberyard since 1989, and the office manager for eight years. She admits she started at the family business at such a young age she says with a smile she was "child labor." But smiles are hard to come by right now for Stacy Sherwood.

"Driving over I thought to myself, there is no way this is real." But she realized it was all too real when she saw the flames soaring high into the sky above Tualatin.

While the Clark family stood before the roaring flames and watched the disaster unfold, firefighters from Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue - TVF&R - fought to contain the fire and protect buildings which stood only feet away at opposite ends of the inferno. Despite the loss of his lumberyard, Harvey Clark has nothing but praise for TVF&R.

"The fire department did a marvelous job of saving that building," says Clark, referring to the only building still standing on the property, occupied by Ancient Wonders, a comic book and game shop located at the edge of the compound. "They didn't get a drop of water in it."

Clark is so anxious to express his gratitude to the firefighters and their leader at the fire, Deputy Fire Marshal Doug Nolan, that he pulls Nolan's business card from his wallet to be sure he spells the name correctly.



Edie Clark discusses future plans with daughter in the small trailer that currently serves as Clark Lumber's headquarters.

"He was very professional, and did a nice job," explains Clark. Despite the ferocity of the blaze, both the Ancient Wonders and Community Warehouse structures were saved, although Community Warehouse did suffer heat and water damage (see accompanying story). Clark gives all the credit to TVF&R.

A week after the fire, Clark Lumber is operating out of a small trailer in the parking lot of the business. A generator runs outside, powering a small air conditioner which keeps the temperature in the trailer tolerable in the scorching summer heat.

Harvey Clark, despite the desolation visible through the window of the trailer, is dressed impeccably, exactly as if you were seeing him walk up and down aisles. His bright red Clark Lumber shirt with the name Harvey embroidered on the chest is crisp and spotless. Add his trademark mustache with the curled ends, and Clark looks as he would on any normal business day. But things are anything but normal.

A chain-link fence surrounds the remains that was Clark Lumber and True Value Hardware. Standing amidst the rubble, a torched delivery truck stands, the outlines of the words "True Value" permanently branded on its door. It is a symbol of determination that not even 2,000 degree fire can break. The place is still buzzing with people and activity, but now everything is oriented to recovery.

The property is two acres in the center of town, not far from Tualatin's Lake of the Commons, and the building was 16,000 feet, including the store and lumber shed. Now the



An impromptu outpouring of support from friends and neighbors appeared soon after word got out.

entire operation is housed in the little construction trailer.

As she and her father sit in the trailer, discussing the fire and its aftermath, busy answering questions and giving directions to the workers who pop in and out the door, Sherwood more than once tears up as she talks about the tragedy that has befallen her family, and the community of Tualatin.

"We keep thinking about everything that is lost," she explains. "There were photos on the walls, and photos in albums. My grandfather hand drew the 1965 opening invitation, and that was framed and hanging on the wall. A few photos had been digitized, but so many were the only copies."

The sense of shock and loss has been felt throughout the community.

"We've had big, strong contractors in tears when they arrive and see what has happened," says Clark.

Even as they work to recover, Clark says the shock has not really worn off for his family, and his extended family, which is how he refers to his longtime staff.

"It's getting to that numb stage," he says. "So much of everything at the moment is hurry up and wait... Waiting for the city, waiting for a bid, waiting for the insurance, waiting for the fire investigators." The cause of the fire has not yet been determined.

But through it all both Clark and Sherwood say one thing that has kept them going is the overwhelming support from the people

Tualatin and beyond. For many years Clark Lumber has been there for Tualatin citizens. They have helped with so many Eagle Scout projects they can't even give a number. They've helped students with school projects, assisted local residents with do-it-yourself projects, cut wood on demand and even fixed lamps for people. They've been a big source of support for all sorts of nonprofit activities, projects, and organizations, such as Community Warehouse.

"We really feel we provide something the community needs," says Clark. "We are part of this community."

And now the people of Tualatin are rallying around Clark Lumber.

"It's been overwhelming," says Clark, "the support we are receiving from the community, encouraging us to get the place back open. People have made signs of support, they filled a banner with signatures, they've even brought food for us."

It is no exaggeration to say the lumberyard business is in the Clark family's blood. Great-grandfather Earl Clark started managing his first lumberyard in 1916, in Alberta, Canada. Harvey Clark was born into the business, as were his children and now granddaughter, Hanna Sherwood, grew up knowing this business and her family's constant dedication to hard work.

"Our family extends beyond our blood family," explains Sherwood. "Our manager David Hess has been with us since 1986. His wife and children have worked here, and his son, Aric, still does. Now his grandchildren come to visit us. Rob Denham, our truck driver, has been with us 37 years, and our yard foreman, Salomé Hidalgo, started in 1989."

Sherwood says that like her, her older brother, Tim Clark, grew up in the business.

Despite the daunting task before him, Clark and his family

do not feel defeated, and view the family lumberyard as a Phoenix prepped to rise from the ashes.

"We plan to stay in business," Clark states with determination apparent in every word. "We're going to get back in full force as fast as we can. Our situation is only temporary and moving forward will take time. It would be nice to expand into a new building and put up something that will be an even stronger asset to the community."

Publisher's Note:

Many people have asked how they can help. There are two ways to get involved. All donations will go towards the future of Clark Lumber and it's reopening.

Sharky's Woodfired Mexican Grill (7115 SW Nyberg St, Tualatin, 503-691-8461) will be doing a fundraiser on Tuesday, August 30th from 4:00pm - 9:30pm. 20% off all proceeds will be donated to the Clark Lumber and True Value Fire Relief Fund.

Clark Lumber and True Value Fire Relief Fund has been set up on CrowdRise. Donations can be made online at www.crowdrise.com/clark-lumber-and-true-value-fire-relief-fund.



Harvey Clark and daughter Stacy Sherwood



Just after 2:30 a.m. in the morning, firefighters responded to reports of smoke and flames at Clark Lumber and True Value Hardware.



Photo courtesy of Tualatin resident Russ Little



The fire-fighting effort continued throughout most of the day.