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Truenorth expanding TC stores

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Workers from Elmer's excavate the future site of a True North convenience store, car wash and new gas station on Munson Avenue in Traverse City on Thursday.

Record-Eagle/Mike Krebs



TRAVERSE CITY — A pair of buildings have been demolished in the last two months to make way for a pair of Truenorth convenience stores and gas stations.

Last week's razing of Schelde's Grille & Spirits — a long-time restaurant at 714 Munson Ave. closed since the final days of 2017 — and the demolition of the Truenorth gas station and convenience store at 1485 W. South Airport Road made way for True North Energy's expansion plans in the region.

The two reconstructions were part of the plan when True North Energy purchased 25 gas station/convenience stores from Schmuckal Oil Company, along with the company's petroleum marketing operation, in August of 2019. True North Energy is based in the Cleveland suburb of Brecksville, Ohio.

"We feel both are going to be great compliments to the Traverse City area and are looking forward to better serving our customers with the expanded offers," True North Energy Vice President of Development Lindsay Lyden said in an email that included conceptual drawings of the two sites.

The South Airport site is expected to open in mid- to late October, Lyden said in a phone interview. A convenience store is being built in the two western-most units of the 42nd Street Plaza to the south and there will be nine fueling dispensers near the corner of South Airport and Lafranier roads.

Construction on the Truenorth location in East Bay Township, which includes the property the former Schelde's and a current gas station and convenience store at 708 Munson Ave. occupied, is expected to begin in the spring and be completed in early July 2022.

The Munson Ave. Truenorth will have a convenience store, touch-free car wash and six fueling dispensers.

"This was the first site we identified in Traverse City," said Lyden, the daughter of True North Energy president Mark Lyden. "This will be our premiere site in Traverse City."

Both new convenience stores will have beer caves, Lyden said.

West South Airport

The first Truenorth renovation project began with the demolition of its own fueling stations and convenience store on the corner of West South Airport and Lafranier roads. Lyden said the gas station and store came down July 10, with Midwest Construction Company out of Chicago doing the bulk of the work.

Lyden said the existing 880-square-foot store just wasn't convenient for anyone.

"It's a great corner; the traffic is very heavy," Lyden said of the South Airport Truenorth location "We were always busy. We just thought the offering there wasn't supplying the customer needs, so we decided to rebuild.

"You couldn't get many people in the store. Then when COVID hit, you couldn't get anyone in the store at all."

But there wasn't a lot of room on the corner for nine fuel pumps and the convenience store that Truenorth sought. So True North Energy started to talk to 42nd Street Plaza Owner and Property Manager Ken Kleinrichert Sr.

True North Energy is leasing the two spaces on the west end of the complex and is in the process of remodeling those spaces into a 4,300-square-foot convenience store.

"The C store is going to be fairly big," Lyden said. "We'll have more offerings of coffee, fountain drinks, hot dogs, sandwiches and other grab-and-go items for food. We hope it will serve the customer needs better than the old one."

But the new convenience store didn't come without some changes.

Desert Sun Tanning Salon, on the westernmost corner of the facility, closed. Adjacent business Bella's Salon moved within 42nd Street Plaza to the former location of The Packaging Store, which relocated to 1516 Barlow St. That location was the former corporate campus for Schmuckal Oil Company, before it sold to True North Energy.

"Oddly enough, it's in the old Shell building," said The Packaging Store Owner Rob Petersen, who is also a U-Haul dealer and couldn't pass up a good pun. "It didn't have anything to do with True North, it just worked out that way. You just have to call it a shell game."

Petersen said the move allowed The Packaging Store to upsize from 2,000 square feet on South Airport to 3,600 on Barlow while still being able to lease overflow parking behind the EPI on 1567 W. South Airport Road.

“It worked out well,” Petersen said. “Business has been through the roof. Last year was a record year and this year we’re 30 percent over that year to date. That’s both the shipping and the U-Haul side of it.”

When the new Truenorth convenience store is open, Kleinrichert said the other 42nd Street Plaza businesses should benefit. It also gives customers an additional access point to South Airport on a busy corner.

“It will be a great anchor and open the visibility of 42nd Street Plaza for the other tenants,” Kleinrichert said. “It’s a nice situation and the the (traffic) flow will be a little better.”

Kleinrichert said BC Pizza, which will remain at 3186 Lafranier Road, has supplied the construction crew with food during the remodeling.

“All the tenants and Truenorth are going out of their way to help each other,” he said. “We couldn’t be happier with the program and how they work. If anything they are going out of their way to make everything go smooth. We’re excited.”

Munson Avenue

True North Energy didn’t need to lease any space on Munson Avenue. It bought the former Schelde’s property from developer Tom McIntyre, managing member of the East Bay Plaza LLC. Lyden said the purchase was made in 2020.

“Tom was great to work with,” Lyden said.

Elmer’s demolished the former restaurant beginning Aug. 24. Lyden said True North Energy will bid out the new construction after Labor Day with an eye toward securing an offer from another Michigan-based company, hopefully one from the area.

Schelde’s, the location of a restaurant for more than 40 years, hosted its last customers Dec. 23, 2017. The site of the restaurant was where Howard Schelde first opened Mr. Steak in 1974.

Plans call for the convenience store on Munson Avenue to be 4,200 square feet. Again, Lyden said Truenorth loves the activity on the east side of Traverse City.

“It’s a great location, right on the main drag going in and out of town,” she said.

While the new Truenorth store on South Airport isn't close to a traditional grocery store, the Munson Avenue location is, with Tom's East Bay a short distance away. Lyden said the customers Truenorth attracts aren't the typical grocery consumer.

"A handful of customers will grab groceries, but it's just because it's there," Lyden said. "They're either getting gas or its just convenient."

Lyden said Truenorth runs 19 gas stations and convenience stores in "the greater Traverse City area." She said no other projects are planned for 2022, but expansion for "2023 and beyond" are in the works.

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