

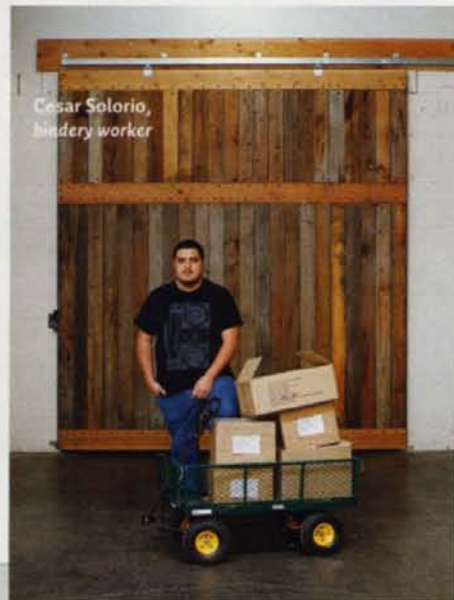
First on the block



Maria Solorio,
bookbinder



Ed Marquand,
Mighty Tieton
founder



Cesar Solorio,
bindery worker

Little loft on the prairie

Karen Quint,
printmaker



Kerry Quint,
contractor

How a group of Seattle artists are helping to reinvent a struggling farm town

BY SHOSHANA BERGER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN CLARK

IT ALL STARTED with a flat tire. In 2005, Ed Marquand, a publisher and bookbinder out exploring the countryside, rode his bike into a scrubby agrarian outpost 2½ hours east of Seattle and was stopped cold by a flat tire. Ed, who can wax philosophical about anything, took the flat as a sign, and spent the afternoon looking around the town, Tieton. (Its name, pronounced Tie-uh-tun, comes from a Native American word for “roiling waters” and refers to a nearby river.)

What Ed found was a square ringed by a smattering of unoccupied storefronts and abandoned warehouses for sale. At

the sole eatery, Vickie’s Tieton Café, he met the tough-as-nails octogenarian proprietor, who still goes to work at 6 every morning. The closest shopping center was 15 miles away, in Yakima.

Beyond the square stretched thousands of acres of apple orchards leading up to the foothills of Mt. Clemens. The local population of about 1,200 consisted mostly of Latino agriculture workers and their families, who’d settled in the town over the last few decades, along with a small holdout of retirees.

The older folks tell stories of Tieton’s former glory—a bowling alley, taverns, a

movie theater, all supported by the profitable harvest of Red Delicious apples. That was before the town’s smaller farms began consolidating and Yakima became such an attraction for retail.

But to Ed Marquand, Tieton looked like a huge opportunity, a fresh start. He started inviting artist, architect, and designer friends to visit the town. All, like Ed, had established businesses back in Seattle, but fantasized about what they could do with some property in a place like this. “People reach a point in their professional lives when they wonder if this is all there is,” Ed says. >56

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The Mighty Tieton Warehouse; a New Year's Eve bonfire.

Tieton real estate was reasonably priced compared with Seattle, and Ed and his partner, Mike Longyear (who founded the Tieton Arts & Humanities group that programs events and workshops), ended up buying a total of nine buildings on the square. "We all coalesced around the idea of creating an incubator for arts businesses," Ed says. They called their project the Mighty Tieton and launched a website to publicize it.

Ed asked Kerry Quint, a contractor and college pal, to oversee the construction. Kerry

divided one of the old fruit warehouses into 14 modern lofts with 11-foot ceilings, welded-steel banisters, and blond-wood cabinets. The pair converted another warehouse into a storefront and gallery where the Mighty Tieton hangs exhibitions ranging from unconventional "art chandeliers" to international kites, and an unused church into a hall that can be rented for gatherings.

Today, a dozen independently owned businesses have started or expanded under the Mighty Tieton banner, including a cheesemaker, a cider press, and Ed's own Marquand Editions | Tieton, which produces art books and paper goods.

Kerry now lives in one of the lofts with his wife, Karen, a printmaker. And making good on the Tieton promise, Kerry and Karen started a wood-and-metal shop and a printmaking studio (with artist Fay Jones and her husband) in the rehabbed warehouse. Both ateliers offer memberships to the public. "Tieton has lots of

space and quiet and a great atmosphere for writing, reading, and painting," Karen says. "People love to come here just to be able to think."

And have a little fun. Most of those Mighty Tietoners who still live in Seattle come to town on the weekends to join in on potluck dinners. Kerry built a long table to feast at, and on mild nights, they open the garage doors of the warehouse to a deck that overlooks a lush garden.

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Intimate though the group has become, those involved in the Mighty Tieton project have worked hard to create a feeling of inclusiveness, inviting locals to become a part of the venture. Kerry heads the Tieton Economic Development Council to work on projects like installing a soccer field, which will be ready for games this summer, and creating a farmers' market, where residents sell produce and crafts. Three years ago, Ed began training a local woman in book arts. She's now one of his best bookbinders.

For a struggling farm town trying to survive a recession, all this adds up to a brighter future—one that will rely on local, artisanal businesses to prosper rather than strip malls and sprawl. "The projects we've worked on are small, but they give people hope that a small town can be viable," Kerry says. "A lot of what we do is about hope."

Everywhere you look in the Mighty Tieton, it shows. ■



Year-round in Tieton

Among the many reasons to visit this orchard town:

APRIL 16 is Goatshead Day, so named to "celebrate the life events that cause us to ricochet off in a completely unexpected direction"—à la the goatshead-vine thorns that gave Ed's bike the flat tire. The holiday will be marked with a banquet and "spontaneous performances."

JUNE 4–JULY 17, the Textile Fabric Show displays handmade textiles from around the country.

AUGUST 27–28, look for Highland Community Days, a classic small-town festival, Tieton-style, complete with a parade, street vendors, and dancing horses.

COME OCTOBER, LitFuse: A Poets' Workshop draws writers of all ages from around the Northwest. At the end of the month, the Día de los Muertos Exhibition begins (Oct 29–Nov 13).

IN DECEMBER, the Mighty Tieton Chandelier Festival takes place: After a juried exhibit of "art chandeliers," the entries are hung in storefronts around town. A Winter Crafts Bazaar hosts a mix of handmade and edible gifts.

» Check the Mighty Tieton website (mightytieton.com) for details on these events.