

The LAST EMPTY SPACE

“We knew sooner or later this would happen. But it does seem a shame ...”

With these words, Bert Ludlam, the Barnstable Commissioner of Deeds, put his signature to the document transferring the last piece of buildable land on Cape Cod to the D & D Corporation, the Brockton-based entity that represents the merged property interests of Dorsey’s Donuts and the CWZ drugstore chain.

The property in question is a 5.5 acre site in Wellfleet that was formerly owned by the Bindlemeier family, proprietors a decade or so ago of the Cape’s only ostrich farm. The business failed after the farm’s twenty-six birds staged a daring daylight escape that created a legendary traffic jam on Route 6 on a July Sunday. Some of the creatures are allegedly still at large.

D & D - which stands for Drugs and Donuts - thereby becomes the largest single property owner on the Cape, with 574 business sites at last count and a property portfolio valued well above six hundred million dollars.

Ludlam, who has been Registrar of Deeds since 2008 and is due to retire next month, stated at a press conference that he was reluctant to sign the papers approving the transfer of the Bindlemeier property, although he had no real choice in the matter. “When I took this job over ten years ago, there was still some open land on the Cape, parcels zoned for business that had still not been built on. If you drove from Woods Hole to Provincetown, you would have sworn that even then there were plenty of donut shops and drugstores. Some of the larger towns seemed to have five or six of each.”

But according to Ludlam, things really got out of hand after the D & D Corporation came into existence. “They seemed to have unlimited resources,” he said. “They’d buy empty land and they’d buy land with buildings on it and they’d buy parcels of any size, in any location. There didn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason to it. But sure enough, if you waited long enough you’d see another donut shop, another drugstore ... it was obscene. And every time you thought that there couldn’t possibly be room for another one, you’d find out very quickly that you were wrong. You wonder how any of them could make money. But maybe that wasn’t the point.”

The donut shops especially seemed to sprout up overnight, like fungus in damp weather. Mary Dudley was a selectman in Brewster when the real breakthrough came: Dorsey’s Donuts opened its first mini-shop in a funeral home.

“We had gotten so used to seeing donut shops in shopping centers and gas stations, in schools and hospitals and jails, that I guess we shouldn’t have been

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surprised or shocked when D & D applied for permission to open a location in Falvey's Funeral Home," recalls Dudley. "Since the application was made early in April, the Zoning Board thought it was some kind of bizarre April Fool's prank and got a big chuckle out of it. But they stopped laughing when D & D's lawyers arrived on the scene bearing letters from various state boards saying that as far as could be determined, there was no insuperable problem with what D & D wanted to do."

Dudley remembers with a shudder the acrimonious weeks of public hearings that followed the application. "Folks were coming to town meetings dressed in Halloween skeleton costumes. One pair of clowns built a plywood coffin in somebody's garage and brought it one of the hearings filled with crullers ... it was surreal. One of the Boston channels sent a news crew down but they parked too close to Cap Winslow's front lawn and he blasted a couple of their tires out with his shotgun while Millie, Cap's collie, chased the lady reporter down the street ... it was a script nobody in Hollywood would dare to write."

But in the end, the Zoning Board had to acquiesce, and D & D got its way. "If you drive past Falvey's now, you'll notice a tasteful Dorsey's Donuts sign hanging under their own. I don't know how much walk-in business the donut shop gets, but I guess everyone's happy with the arrangement - they just renewed the contract for another five years," said Dudley.

A spokesperson for the D & D company confirmed the purchase of the Bindlemeier property, which he claimed would be used for both retail and storage purposes. The buildings on the site - which town records indicate date back to 1865 - would be razed "as soon as we get this 'historic designation' thing cleared up." According to this spokesperson, D & D management weren't aware of the fact that theirs was the last piece of buildable land on the Cape. "Gee ... uh ... that's too bad, I guess, huh? Hey, I've got another call here ... talk to you later ... "

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