



Beth Portesi and her partner Casey Ameil in a screen capture from an episode of "Ugly Homes of the Pacific" that included a segment about their Applegate Valley home.

## Applegate Valley farm owners land huge appearance on HGTV

BY KAYLA MORENO

Having others describe your dream home as "ugly" would make most people squirm. But for Beth Portesi and her partner, Casey Ameil, the descriptor was the chance at winning a large renovation project that could completely change their lives. The pair have had big dreams of owning a property to start an organic vegetable farm for years. However, the economic factors, like the famously polarizing housing market, kept their dreams at bay until recently, when a serendipitous opportunity arose.

The pair gained experience over the past seven years by working on other peoples' properties across the world. From Bali to Big Sur, they have learned encyclopedias' worth of knowledge about farming, gardening, living off the grid, and homesteading.

Casey worked as a property manager for a nonprofit organization called MEarth prior to relocating to the Applegate Valley. MEarth's mission is to educate and inspire through environmental stewardship and they primarily focus on outdoor education for children. Here, Casey gained experience working on the land and developed critical skills by teaching kids sustainable farming practices.

"This married his passion of farming and connecting with the community in a meaningful way," says Beth.

That is no surprise, either. The on-the-job experience was crucial for the dynamic duo. Their vision was always there, but it was clarified by various endeavors taken both together and independently.

"After years of living and working on other people's land, we were craving a place to plant our roots," says Beth.

In February 2022 they purchased a 20-acre lot north of Provolt in the Applegate Valley. This humble beginning was just that—a fresh start and a grand step toward their goals. The zany, one-of-a-kind house was designed by a mycologist in the 1980s. The quirky qualities of the property were charming, but the lack of functionality in the house was obvious. The couple wanted the home to accommodate their demanding farm lifestyle. Again, economic factors provided some challenges, leading them back to the drawing board.

Then, late one night, Beth had an out-of-the-box idea. HGTV is a popular

television network that showcases exceptionally impressive home renovation projects. She perused HGTV's casting call section and spotted an ad that read, "Do you have a house that's a wacky, tacky or run-down eyesore—but in a dreamy location?" She took a leap of faith and sent in their submission.

To their surprise, they received an offer to showcase their home on "Ugliest House in America." Beth and Casey could use the quirks of their new property to their advantage thanks to a hit show that was now knocking at their door. This show chooses 15 of the "Ugliest Houses in America" to compete for one \$150,000 renovation by esteemed HGTV designer, Alison Victoria.

Most people would recoil if someone considered their home to be one of the ugliest in America. For Beth and Casey, it was an exciting opportunity. They agree that the experience "desensitized us from the word 'ugly.'" HGTV described this season's homes as "the ugliest homes in paradise." Of course, the Applegate Valley landscape provided a gorgeous canvas to work with. The opportunity to be on the show was a direct reflection of the pair's drive to bring their dreams to life. After all, appearances are not everything. Behind this ugly home was a pair of hopeful farmers aiming to make big contributions within their community.

"Our biggest priority is taking care of our land, the food, and the people we feed," says Casey. By creating Lazy Acres Farm, they aim to make organic produce even more accessible in southern Oregon.

While they didn't win the grand prize renovation, Beth and Casey's episode, titled "Ugly Homes of the Pacific," aired in August. Catch a rerun of their episode or stream it on YouTube, Discovery+, or Amazon Prime.

Their featured property, Lazy Acres Farm, is a small-scale farm and homestead that exclusively uses organic and regenerative practices. You can start directly supporting Lazy Acres Farm by purchasing their produce beginning next spring. Until then, you can follow their story on Instagram (@\_lazyacresfarm) or online at lazyacresfarm.org.

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## Another delicious bakery in the Applegate Valley

BY DIANA COOGLE

The spring 2022 issue of the *Applegater* featured an article about bakeries in the Applegate, taking the reader on a little tour, moving north through the valley. But what if you went the other direction, towards the Rogue Valley? Then you would certainly stop in Ruch for something at Sweets-N-Eats, at Ryan's Outpost, 181 Upper Applegate Road.

If you are there in the morning, Wednesday through Sunday, you're likely to meet co-owner Patty Knowlton, who starts serving breakfast at 7 am and makes the dinner specials. If you're there at noon or later, you might meet her daughter and business partner, Tasha Knowlton, who cooks, waitresses, and does the baking. Her niece, Nina, also helps with the baking. The café is open until 7 pm (3 pm on Sundays).

Tasha and Patty started Sweets-N-Eats in July 2020, an unpropitious time to start a restaurant, but, pandemic notwithstanding, Sweets-N-Eats soon became a popular eating place for baked goods and for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. "Thank goodness for the amazing locals, who supported us a whole bunch," Tasha says.

Tasha and Patty both worked at the Applegate Store and Café before Tasha went to pastry school, interned at the Jacksonville Inn, and became pastry manager there. She and Patty also both worked at Café Ruch. They bought the business in 2020 and renamed it



Tasha Knowlton and Patty Knowlton outside their cafe. Photo: Diana Coogle.

Sweets-N-Eats. By now, the business has prospered so well it takes the two of them plus seven employees to keep it going.

If you stop in just for baked goods, you might be especially enticed by the vanilla-cream-filled doughnuts, a house favorite, or the cheesecakes, cookies, or dessert donuts. If you're there for lunch or dinner, try one of their popular burgers or, a frequent choice, a hot pastrami sandwich.

By all means, if you're looking for baked goods in the Applegate, don't neglect Sweet-N-Eats!

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