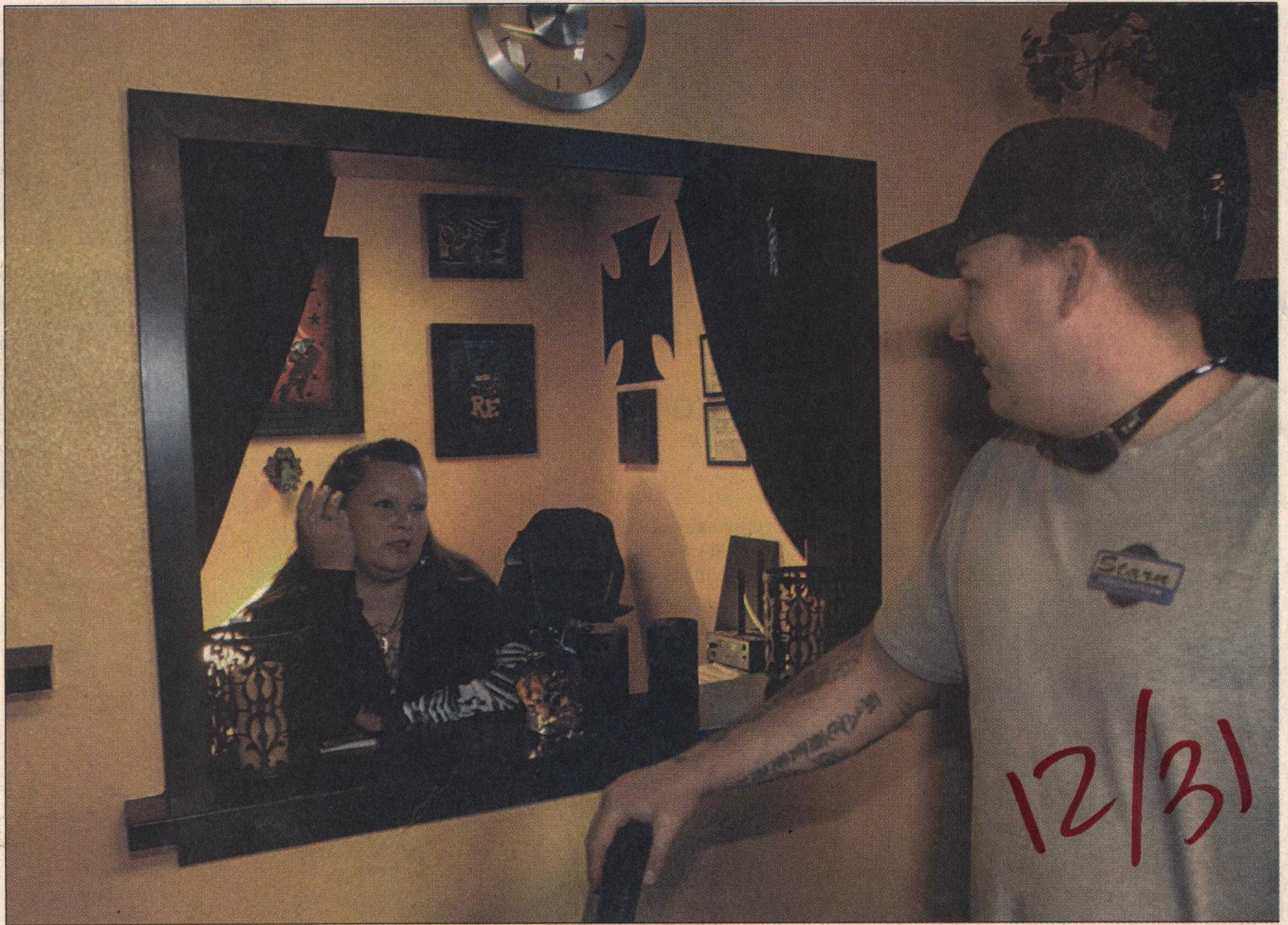


Making a pioneering mark



ABOVE: Tattoo artist Misty Galvan (left) and Geoff Wells, owner of the new Freedom Tattoo & Piercing, prepare for the business' official opening next week. BELOW: Freedom Tattoo & Piercing is located near Green Valley Road at 1910 Freedom Blvd.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Philosophy of first tattoo shop in Watsonville designed to put customers first

By ERIC ANDERSON
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Freedom Tattoo & Piercing has walls painted yellow and black, the colors of Watsonville High School.

Customers will be able to look up tattoo designs on the Internet on site, and print them out for the shop's artists to apply.

There will be flat-screen televisions in every room, so customers have entertainment as ink is applied to their bodies.

If it appears that owner Geoff Wells has thought of everything, it's because he's had years to envision the look and concept of Freedom Tattoo, Watsonville's first tattoo shop on record. Not only has the 32-year-old wanted to own his own tattoo shop for the last decade, but he's gone through a two-year battle — which included two lawsuits — with the City of Watsonville before getting final approval from the Planning Commission in October.

"We figured that since we're the first and only shop, we need to come out and make a statement," Wells said.

Now, Wells and his staff of three tattoo artists have one more small wait — for the city to finish its end-of-the-year

shutdown so it can sign off on the last permits — before the shop can open sometime next week.

"We're champing at the bit to get open, but we spent two years fighting to get this place open, so we're not going to cut corners in the last week," Wells said.

Wells, from Santa Cruz, said his central focus is having a shop where customers get what they want, instead of what the artists may prefer. Wells — who is not a tattoo artist, but has many tattoos — said that the opposite happens in many local tattoo shops owned by artists.

"I'm a customer, so I'm working from a customer standpoint," he said.

Freedom Tattoo artist Misty Galvan, a nine-year veteran of the trade, said she approved of Wells' emphasis.

"I'm just excited to do all the work in the city and to be part of this tattoo shop," she said.

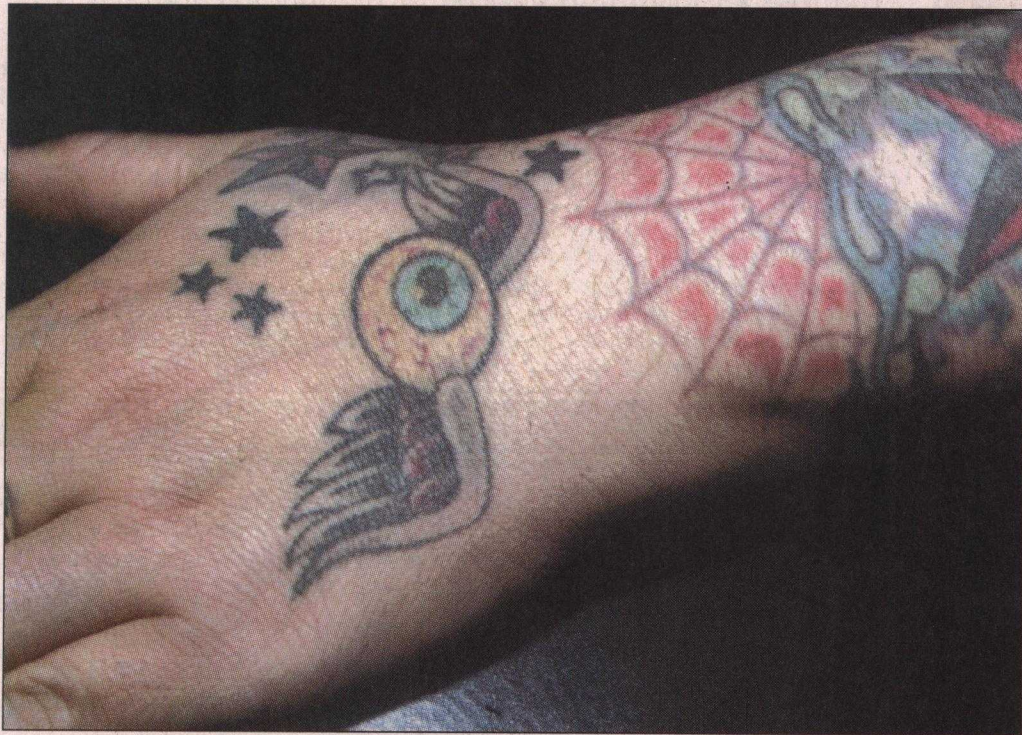
The 1,250-square-foot shop is located on 1910 Freedom Blvd., although the parking lot is entered through Tabacchi's Family Coffey Shoppe's parking lot on Green Valley Road. In addition to a front



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A tattoo
of a
flying
eyeball
and stars
is a
sample
of body
art at
Freedom
Tattoo &
Piercing.

Tarmo
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TATTOO

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lobby, Freedom Tattoo contains three tattoo rooms, one room that will split between tattoos and piercing, and a clean room for sterilization, as legally required.

From 1962 to September 2007, the city had an ordinance that requires that tattoos be performed under the supervision of a physician — a requirement that effectively prevented tattoo shops from opening. Wells' mother, Kate Wells, a civil rights attorney who took him to get his first tattoo when he was 15, approached the city about changing the ordinance. The city did so, but she was unhappy about heavy zoning in the ordinance that limited the sites where a tattoo parlor could be located.

The Freedom Boulevard site fit within the restrictions, however, and Wells began the process of creating his shop. The haggling with city officials is apparently over.

"They made me jump through so many hoops that I feel like a circus performer," Wells said.

The primary concerns expressed about the tattoo shop were over possible gang and crime issues. In its final approval of Freedom Tattoo, the Planning Commission cited that there was no data that connects increased crime with tattoo shops. And Wells purposefully avoided blue and red, the most common gang colors, in the shop's color scheme; most tattoo shops are red and black, he said.

He said people have been extremely supportive, noting that about 150 people came to a Dec. 13 celebration for the shop, with many of them signing up to get tattoos.

"Everyone's having a great response so far," Wells said. "Everyone's been stoked about it."

And judging from the smile on Wells' face, he might be the most stoked of all.

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To contact Freedom Tattoo & Piercing, call 763-2828.