

Glamping sets up camp in Walla Walla

Chillville is a new glamour camping venture at the airport industrial park.



Zibby Wilder, left, and Pamela Ottaviano Rhodes enjoy the comfortable kitchen in their new trailer for future rentals at 675 Lockheed Ave. in Walla Walla. Photo by [Michael Lopez](#).

By Vicki Hillhouse

Published by Walla Walla Union Bulletin

- As of Thursday, July 10, 2014

Some of the sweetest words for road warriors rolling into their vacation destinations.

At Chillville Walla Walla, which officially opened last week, it is the greeting at the gateway to glamping.

Those who make their way to the new spot on Lockheed Avenue arrive not only to respite but also to the latest twist on vacationing for those who want to be one with both nature and amenities.

Here glamour and camping intersect at the least likely of places: the Walla Walla Regional Airport Industrial Park. A cluster of campers — ranging from a 22-foot 2012 Airstream Bambi to a 10-foot Kit made in 1949 and still in its original condition — and more to come.

A customary place for visitors to arrive, the airport hasn't been one where they stay. And now they can at a place that rides one of the biggest national trends in lodging. Depending on where you travel, glamping can take a variety of forms: luxurious yurts with beds, refurbished travel trailers set up as curbside campers — even fancy tree houses.

At the airport property, Chillville offers a selection of campers under an open sky, ranging in price per night from \$55 to \$165, depending on the features and size of the campers. There are bucolic surroundings as well as creature comforts. The great outdoors and the great indoors. Communal space or isolation. Solitude and the faint sound of passing highway traffic, all within walking distance of the Port of Walla Walla's winery incubator complex with four tasting rooms and one tap room.

Chillville founders Zibby Wilder and Pamela Ottaviano Rhodes market it as the convergence of “vintages and vintage.”

Opened with just a couple of the up to nine units that will eventually make up the community, it will build upon itself. Other units are either en route or in a varying stages of refurbishment.

Chillville sits in a large field with utility trenches so new they almost look like nature trails leading through the site. There are giant shade trees, a barbecue area and, eventually, a gaming place for pétanque and horse shoes, Wilder said. Wi-Fi will also be part of the setup.

Amid the range of hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, guesthouses and vacation rentals, this is another way to experience Walla Walla.

For Wilder, a Walla Walla resident, and Ottaviano Rhodes, who lives in the Seattle area and treks back and forth, the venture combines their shared love of travel, exploration, campers and treading lightly on the planet and resources.

“It’s camping,” Wilder said. “But you still have everything around.”

“I’ve traveled all over the world,” Ottaviano Rhodes added. “This experience of being outdoors is something you don’t get a in a hotel room.”

Thus far, their customers have tended to be younger folks. One couple were celebrating their honeymoon during an experimental setup to test the concept at Wilder’s personal property. People who tend to be open to the idea seem to like the option of having independent space while also being able to mingle with others — something to which Ottaviano Rhodes said she can relate.

“When I get up at 5 in the morning, I don’t want to worry about disturbing someone else,” she said. “Being a house guest is a different experience. The people coming aren’t house guests but they’re not exactly customers like they would be in a hotel.”

Each camper unit — tracked down online through Craigslist, eBay or other resources — is individually named to reflect its character. “Sweetie Pie,” for instance is a 22-foot Airstream Bambi. “Stella” is a 1964 refurbished Barth that sleeps two. “Montana” is the 1949 10-foot Kit left in its original condition.

Coming soon will be “Etta.” The 1954 Stewart that made its way to Walla Walla from Vashon Island is described as a “beautiful, soulful lady.” She has wood trim on the inside, a sliding screen door, a bath tub and, perhaps most impressively, a full kitchen complete with stove top and oven.

Ottaviano Rhodes finds the campers and has scoured the region to check them out in person or haul them to Walla Walla while Wilder handles the operation along the homefront.

The pair met in April through a mutual friend. Both had toyed with the same idea for a glamping site. When they met, they decided to embark on the journey together. It’s an idea that’s been contemplated by many others they’ve spoken to along the way.

“We’re either going to show them how they missed out or what they saved themselves from,” Ottaviano Rhodes quipped of her glamping “experiment.”

Using conservative occupancy rates, they figure five campers will be needed to break even at the site. They have hookups for eight and could possibly go up to nine. Each camper will sleep two adults. With five, that puts maximum occupancy at 10 people.

With a spectrum of amenities in each camper — some so primitive there may be no hot water and others with a full shower — they intend to find out from experience what the consumer demand is for. They may change out campers from time to time, but otherwise the travel trailers won’t be moved around once they’re on-site.

“I like the idea of having sort of a curated collection — something for everyone,” Wilder said.