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Tuesday, November 18, 2003

Rifle manufacturer to locate his shop in Packwood industrial park

By Brian Mittge
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PACKWOOD — An Eastern Washington gunsmith has relocated to Packwood, and has signed a lease on 2,000 square feet of the first building in the community's fledgling industrial park.

Jim L. Gill, owner of The Little Gun Shack, specializes in the manufacture of high-quality rifles, as well as repair and maintenance of regular and antique guns.

Gill, 57, and his wife moved to Packwood about six weeks ago from Tieton, Wash., in the Yakima area.

He started his business about 15 years ago. His custom-made guns start at \$1,300. He also repairs guns and manufactures parts.

Gill said he liked the Packwood area, and wanted the highway exposure of the PDA building.

"We like the location, we like the mountains, and the people," he said. Once Gill establishes his business, he hopes to hire two employees. He said that could happen by spring.

"If we do hire in the spring it would be local people, providing we can find someone who's qualified," Gill told The Chronicle.

At full production, his operation would require three to five workers. The East Lewis County Public Development Authority owns the building, which was built in early 2001. Last week the county commission voted to spend \$48,000 of state economic development money to fix up the inside of the building.

Whenever the building is ready, Gill said, he'll move in — he hopes by early December.

Lee Grose, president of the PDA, said there are other small

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manufacturing companies that want to set up shop in part of the 8,000-square-foot industrial park building. In a news release, Grose said he was excited that the Packwood area might have finally "turned the corner" on job losses in the area's economy. The Packwood area lost hundreds of jobs when the community's last mill closed in the late 1990s.

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Brian Mittge covers politics, the environment and Lewis County government for The Chronicle. He may be reached by e-mail at bmittge@chronline.com, or by telephoning 807-8237.

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