

Hospitality firm hopes to take Carlton tourism to new heights



Rachel Thompson/News-RegisterBen Powers, a technology company owner and pilot who created Aileron Hospitality to combine his love of customer service, aviation and wine, looks over plans for some of Aileron's new lodging offerings. Guests who stay in the newly built or remodeled spaces can fly off on day trips, then return to their base in Carlton. On the wall behind Powers is the company's wine label, which shows his plane and the views he loves from the air.



Rachel Thompson/News-RegisterGerardo Hernandez, owner of Rancho Verde landscaping, front left, and his brother, Jesus Hernandez, work on the rock patio at Aileron Hospitality's new lodgings in Carlton. The site features two separate rentals, one 1,500 square feet and the other 500, which can be booked separately or together; a remodeled farmhouse next door also can be rented alone or in tandem with the newly built lodgings.



Rachel Thompson/News-RegisterUpstairs above the Carlton Bakery, Aileron has its lobby, meeting and work rooms and gym for clients who are staying in any of its lodging properties. Owner Ben Powers said this gives them the services of a central location, plus the privacy of staying in a residential area.



Keith Paolo

Ben Powers had a successful career in technology. For his next professional step, he wants an endeavor that incorporates his love of flying airplanes with his desire to help the community he calls home.

"Aviation is who I am. Carlton is my home," he said.

Powers founded Aileron Hospitality, a novel lodging concept with a centralized lobby and other amenities along with a variety of places to stay and things to do. Its motto is "Discovery Differently."

Guests can relax in a roomy space with a lawn in Carlton, explore the local area, or take a quick plane trip to the redwoods, a Mariners game in Seattle, a concert in Eugene or a golf course in Bend.

"They wake up and go to sleep here," he said. "It's about being here and also being able to see the Northwest — see more and experience more in a different way."

Aileron's services will bring more trade to other businesses in Carlton, Powers said.

Guests might have breakfast at the Carlton Bakery, located on the lower floor of the building that contains Aileron's fitness center, walk to Cuvée or Hayward for dinner or visit local storefronts to taste wine, buy gifts and purchase food for a picnic — charging their purchases to their room, in many cases. Or they might enjoy a local festival, such as Carlton Fun Days — at this year's event, Aileron offered helicopter rides as a fundraiser benefiting the See Ya Later Foundation.

"Carlton is so unique," he said. "The feeling ... and it's blessed with incredible weather, scenic views, world-class wine and high-quality food. People come here and change their lives."

Powers grew up in rural Oregon and became captivated by flying when he was 15. He earned his private pilot's certification when he was 17 from Oregon State University's flight school. After spending his first year of college at OSU, he continued at Santa Clara University — a move that took him away from flying for a few years.

He returned to his aviation hobby as he worked in his first career. "Flying is part of me," he said. "There's nothing like getting in the air. It's leveling. You realize how insignificant you are."

He added, "To soar like a bird ... it's such a rare perspective on geography and life."

He's flown all over Oregon, he said. He especially enjoys trips over the Willamette Valley and the Coast Range, which he said offer the most beautiful scenery, especially when the seasons are changing.

"I fly almost every day. It keeps me grounded," he said.

He's met many people through flying, he said. One was Keath Paolo of Yamhill, now a builder whose company, Orizzonte, is working on projects for Aileron Hospitality.

Near downtown, Paolo is constructing two new units next to a restored farmhouse that Aileron has been renting to clients for several years. In addition, Orizzonte is remodeling a house with Coast Range views in southwest Carlton and will be working on a nearby home and other properties.

Powers built a software company that served hotel chains, learning much about the hospitality business from clients, he said.

After returning to Oregon from Santa Clara, he and his wife settled in Portland. In 2005, they bought 50 acres east of Carlton and moved there full time until 2016.

"I wanted to get back to the dirt," he said, adding that his wife, Lauren, is a native of Southern California, but she loves it here as well.

"I'm an introvert. My soul needs space," Powers said. "For the first time, I felt at home. There's no place I'd rather be."

They planted three acres in wine grapes, establishing Aileron Hill Vineyard. Most of the wine they bottle is donated to charitable organizations for projects that help children and the community.

The bottles of sparkling reds and whites, Pinot and other varieties bear a label inspired by the landscape colors Powers sees from the air.

He also plans to place Aileron Hill Wine in the lodging company's suites, he said, completing the trio of interests that inspire the company: wine, lodging and aviation. "Every unit will have a wine cellar; they can take some home," he said.

The company's logo also incorporates those interests: the arrow-like shape reminds him of a paper airplane.

Not surprisingly, Powers' home property has a landing strip where he can take off and land in his Piper Cub bush plane.

His lodging company uses a different plane, and a commercial pilot, for its excursions from the McMinnville Airport. Having flights available makes it quick and easy to get to locations that would normally be a day's drive away, he said.

That's not the only unique aspect of Aileron Hospitality.

When he arrived in the Carlton area, Powers noticed there were numerous separate rental properties, but no hotel offering luxurious rooms and concierge services. "There was no network; no 'lobby,'" he said.

So, he developed one. "People book with us, and we help them plan their stay," he said. "We send them a list of all the things they have access to and they choose."

His lodging sites are in several locations, but there is a central place for customers to check in, work out, use Wi-Fi, work in a small area or hold a meeting in a conference room — or just enjoy the view of downtown Carlton, its pool and park. They also can go to the central building for amenities such as bicycles to borrow, a personal trainer or a yoga instructor.

Aileron has connections to local restaurants and other services as well, he said. "It's like we made a resort campus out of Carlton."

Aileron has one lodging site open and several others that Paolo is finishing, along with its central facilities. Powers said five should be finished by the end of 2026 and seven by the end of 2027.

The company just broke ground on a structure adjacent to his vineyard. The "House at the Vineyard" will be able to provide lodging for up to six people and host additional guests for bonfires or wine tasting.

He said he wants Aileron's services to be family-friendly and "not super-expensive." He wants to attract visitors who already know the area, those looking for something different, business travelers as well as aviation buffs or mountain bikers.

For more information about Powers' business, visit aileronhospitality.com.

