

CLOSE WINDOW

Published: 2009-04-02

Shell shuts popular station

Purcells Cove Road garage didn't sell enough gas, owner says

By BRUCE ERSKINE Business Reporter

Circle City Shell has run out of gas.

"Shell is decommissioning the site, they're done," Jacques Raymond, operator of the small two-pump, two-service-bay station on Purcells Cove Road, said in an interview Wednesday.

The station, across from Regatta Point, was the last full-service gas bar in Halifax, but Mr. Raymond, who took it over from long-time operator Wayne Peters in 2003, said its low volume sales didn't meet Shell Canada's corporate requirements.

"We're too small," he said. "They want four million litres a year or more and we pumped 1.5 million or less."

Mr. Raymond, whose sister is local New Democrat MLA Michele Raymond, said another factor that might have played a role in Shell's decision was the issue of liability insurance.

"A site with 10 pumps has the same liability as one with two pumps," he said, adding that he wouldn't be surprised to see other Shell gas stations suffer a similar fate as the company focuses on its Alberta oilsands investment.

Shell will begin removing the station's pumps and underground storage tanks next week, said Mr. Raymond, who hopes to purchase the property and operate it as an expanded three- or four-bay garage.

"It should be good to buy if Shell gives us a certificate of a clean lot," he said, adding that he expects it will take a few months to sort out the details. "If the ground is good, I'll buy it. If not, I won't."

Mr. Raymond said that even if he owned the site, he would have to buy gas from Shell if he decided to operate independent gas pumps there, a condition that would prevent him from making money on gas sales.

"If they can't afford it, how can I?" he said, estimating that it would cost upwards of \$500,000 to install his own pumps and tanks. "And insurance would be insane."

The station was popular with the local community for its friendly, personal service. It even drew customers, many elderly, from outside the neighbourhood who were willing to pay a few cents

more a litre to have their gas pumped for them.

Lisa Menchions, a long-time Circle City Shell customer who lives and works in the neighbourhood, was disappointed by Shell's decision to pull the plug on the station.

"I think it's a deep loss to the community," she said, noting that she and many other people in the area had their vehicles safety-checked and repaired there.

"They were always upfront and honest," she said. "They were part of my daily life."

Shell Canada spokesman John Peck wouldn't comment on the reasons behind the station's closure, citing company policy.

"We don't get into specifics," he said in an interview from Toronto on Wednesday, noting that some stations are closed because they require a significant investment or no longer fit the company's strategy.

He did say that Shell, which has seven other gas stations in HRM, remains committed to doing business in the area.

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