

## **The Mundts say goodbye to Meridian's rural lifestyle**

**As countryside vanishes, family sells out and moves to suburbia**

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MERIDIAN — The last night John and Marty Mundt slept in their rural Meridian farmhouse, they meticulously packed boxes and relived more than 30 years of memories.

Outside, a column of earthy-smelling smoke spiraled up from the home's wood stove. Inside, nails marked the wall where photos once hung, while barren shelves and half-filled boxes testified to lives in transition.

The Mundts raised their children in this house on 22 acres just south of Overland Road between Linder and Ten Mile, where the family spent hours tending land and caring for 4-H and FFA animals. They cherished their lifestyle.

The couple sold their land and moved to a new custom-built home in a Meridian subdivision.

The Mundts' story is about a family that lived the rural life, despite growth and change that made their quiet farming town a booming city. The story of Meridian is one of rural roots giving way to growth and development, subdivisions and congested roads.

Today, many Meridian families, like the Mundts, face the choice of selling their land for a secure retirement or holding on to the rural lifestyle they know and love.

### **Building a rural lifestyle outside Meridian**

John and Marty Mundt, both 60, graduated from the University of Idaho in 1967. Marty earned a degree in social work while John earned his in agricultural education.

The couple moved into their little, aging farmhouse on 22 acres in 1974. They both went to work for the Meridian School District.

"I can still remember coming down Eagle Road, a two-lane highway surrounded by ag land," John said of his first trip into Meridian in 1967. "Meridian was a very rural place." Marty worked in special education for 21 years, while John taught agriculture in Meridian and later worked as an administrator for the state department of vocational education. They retired in 2002, Marty from Meridian Schools and John as a professor of agricultural education for the University of Idaho.

The kids, now 33 and 36 years old, learned to ride their bikes on Overland Road. That would be impossible now, John said.

"I used to run every morning on Overland to Franklin. It's too dangerous now," he said.

The Mundts' children are more nostalgic about the farmhouse and the land than their parents are, Marty said. "They are both really happy for us," Marty said. "They remember it for what it used to be, and it's not anymore."

Their son, Peter, lives in Boise. Their daughter, Christine Mundt-Perez, lives in San Diego. The kids raised a menagerie of 4-H and FFA animals and regularly would walk up the street to fetch fresh milk from the neighboring dairy farm.

John is quick to point out that he is not a farmer, though the Mundts have grown various crops such as hay and grain and raised cattle and pigs over the years. More recently, the land has been leased to a farmer who grows hay and grain.

"We are acreage residents. We are agriculturalists," John said. "Our lives were pretty busy with work. It's merely been a place to live in a rural environment."

Marty paused and rolled her eyes a bit. The kids called it "the farm," she replied.

"It was something we had always dreamed of," Marty said. "Part of the reason why we moved here was to give the kids the experience of not growing up in a subdivision."

Even if 22 acres can be considered a "hobby," John and Marty said it takes work they are not inclined to do as they get older.

"I've loved living here," John said. "But don't get me wrong when I say having a postage stamp lawn won't be too bad."

### **Traffic changes personal habits and activities**

These days, high-volume traffic on Overland road and urban subdivisions are encroaching on the Mundts. Inside the house, you can hear the hum from hundreds of cars and trucks on Overland and Interstate 84 , occasionally punctuated by the roar of a diesel.

Turning a profit farming is an increasingly difficult proposition, John said, and crowded traffic makes it difficult to move farm equipment along city roads.

"It's been a gradual change, but you see it every day. I used to get up every morning and change irrigation water, and the only people I'd see were neighbors," John said.

"Or the milk truck. You knew neighbors very well," Marty said.

John doesn't want anyone to think he's a farmer selling out his land and family history for a

giant pay day, so he deftly dances around the subject of price, specific acreage and developer's plans for his property. Bottom line, he just doesn't want to talk about it. Mundts' land is destined to become part of a 300-plus-acre planned community, said developer Jim Jewett, who has built several other subdivisions across the Treasure Valley.

The Mundts' land and other parcels along Overland Road from Linder to the Ten Mile location are the ideal locations for a "master planned community," Jewett said. Overland soon will be improved and widened to five lanes. A new freeway interchange at Ten Mile also will be built in the next few years,

"I see a lot of the farmers in general use their land for the purpose of retirement. They have worked it and now they are taking advantage of these prices to have another way of life," Jewett said.

Sid Freeman, a third-generation farmer and board member for Canyon County's Farm Bureau, laments the loss of Treasure Valley farmland. Specialty crops grown in the Valley, such as food seed crops, are shipped around the world, he said.

Unfortunately, Freeman said, many farmers have a hard time turning profits given current conditions, including fuel prices and regulations.

"So if someone comes by and offers us \$25,000 an acre for our land, we think 'what a fool,' but we take it," he said. "People have discovered Idaho and the Treasure Valley. We would be the fools not to accept that type of money."

Michael Hummell, a local real estate agent with Holland Realty, said bare land in the area around Ten Mile and Overland Road is selling for between \$100,000 and \$115,000 per acre. The price is higher for areas that have sewer and other infrastructure nearby, he said. Hummell said he has heard from the title companies that since Jan. 1, Ada and Canyon counties have seen around \$1 billion in property transactions. Most of these are larger parcels of 20 acres or more, he said.

John Mundt said his decision to move from his small, rural acreage has more to do with wanting to spend time fishing, traveling and visiting family and friends.

"When we were here as a family, farming this place, taking care of it, getting up; I was the gentleman farmer," John said. "But you reach stages in life and maybe you want to travel more. It will be nice to just go and not worry about it."

Even so, Marty said, it will be a long time before she can drive by the home and land she has lived on for three decades.

"Transition is hard, especially if you are going from something very pleasant," Marty said. "But the change can be very exciting. We have some enviable memories."



Photos by Joe Jaszewski / The Idaho Statesman

John and Marty Mundt share a kiss in the kitchen of the Meridian farmhouse they lived in for 32 years. Marty found the train to her wedding dress buried in a closet and put it on to show her husband. "Kiss me like you did 39 years ago," she told John. The Mundts, both retired, are selling their 22-acre farm and moving to new home in a Meridian subdivision.

When she was 6 years old in 1976, Christine Mundt-Perez inscribed her name and handprint in the concrete on the west side of the family's barn. She recently visited the spot for a final time.



Peter Mundt and Christine Mundt-Perez, holding daughter Isabella, grew up on the farm and paid a final visit together to the barn where they raised cattle and pigs. Peter said he used to have dreams as a young boy of the barn's hay door leading to a secret room.



The Mundts' farmhouse is on 22 acres in Meridian on Overland Road between Ten Mile and Linder roads.



John Mundt carries a bar stool from the house to the garage, where the family was storing leftover household items.



Christine Mundt-Perez rescued several sentimental items from the farmhouse where she grew up, including teacups hand-painted by her great-grandmother, which she planned to take home with her to San Diego.

Enlarge 



### Meridian's growth

Meridian is one of the fastest-growing towns in the country's third-fastest growing state. Idaho's population grew by 2.4 percent — 33,956 people — from July 1, 2004, to July 1, 2005, for a total population of 1,429,096, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. Meridian has grown from a sleepy dairy town of less than 10,000 people in 1990 to nearly 60,000 today. The rapid growth has strained the city's infrastructure and services, like parks, sewer, roads and schools.