

Rural renewal: Wolf Creek men turn old mining site into watery wonderland

By Jeff Duewel
of the Daily Courier

WOLF CREEK — Ernie Singer searched far and wide for a property with lots of water on it, where he would retire and build his dream home.

Ten years ago on the Internet he stumbled across 80 acres along Wolf Creek near the old settlement of Speaker. It had a small lake, a spring and at least three creeks.

One problem. The place had been mined by "giants," or high-pressure water pipes 100 years ago. Gravel tailings piled up everywhere.

"It looked like an atomic bomb dropped on it," said the 66-year-old retired businessman who emigrated from Germany in 1951.

But Singer was up to the challenge. He and son Matthew, now 28, spent the next four or five years with an excavator and dump truck turning the tailing piles into a dam that backed up a sparkling reservoir that tripled the size of the previous pond, to 6.5 surface acres.

"I'm a self-made man. I always did my own work," Singer said.

Singer used trees on his property to build his house, including the cedar siding. He cut five miles of trails through the forest.

After about four years building the dam, Matthew wondered when it would end.

"Six days a week, for four-and-a-half years," Matthew recalled. "About year three I



JEFF DUEWEL/Daily Courier

Ernie Singer and his son Matthew built this 6-acre lake out of old tailing piles from gold mining a century ago near Wolf Creek.



“At 6:30 in the morning you don't know which way is up. (The lake) looks like a mirror.”

Ernie Singer
Wolf Creek resident

was wondering if we were ever going to get done.”

Today, Matthew pounds nails, irrigates and does other chores required on a large property.

In the evening the pair can now sit on the deck of the 4,500-square-foot home they built and stare out at fruit trees and wildflowers where gravel was once piled. They irrigate more than an acre of lawn from a spring up the hill, where old-growth Douglas firs loom.

"We keep busy. It's not bad living here," Singer said.

The trout in the lake chase flies in the evening, and the geese and other fowl paddle about.

Singer likes to walk around the lake every morning.

"At 6:30 in the morning you

Ten years ago Singer bought the property for \$240,000. Today, it's for sale for \$2.4 million.

don't know which way is up. It looks like a mirror.”

Below the dam that father and son built, old relics from mining days lie scattered around, including rusted 36-inch pipes that used to carry water from up the hill to the mining area.

The history of the mining in the area can be found in Larry McLane's book "First There



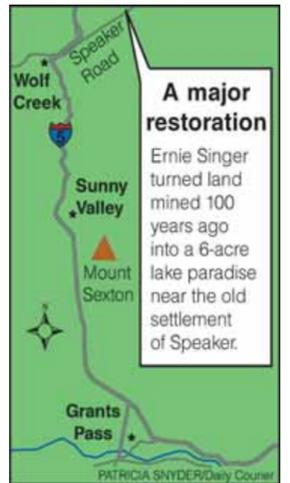
JEFF DUEWEL/Daily Courier

Ernie Singer points to pipes that used to blast water onto the gold-bearing ore along Wolf Creek.

Was Twogood." Singer was a builder in Portland, ran hardware stores in

Phoenix and Oakridge, and was in the telephone equipment business for many years. When

his store in Oakridge burned down, he used insurance proceeds to buy the Wolf Creek



A major restoration

Ernie Singer turned land mined 100 years ago into a 6-acre lake paradise near the old settlement of Speaker.

property, for \$240,000. It had a 1,000-square-foot home on it as well.

Singer split with his wife a few years ago, and isn't sure what the future holds. The property is for sale for \$2.4 million.

For now he's enjoying his little paradise in the mountains and forests of Southern Oregon.

"If it doesn't sell, it doesn't sell," Singer said. "Maybe I'll find a woman who likes to live in the country."

Before



Photo by ERNIE SINGER

Father and son spent four years filling dump truck after dump truck of gravel to build the lake.

After



Photos by ERNIE SINGER

Daisies line the lake, top, during a spring day, while a deep blanket of snow creates a serene setting during the winter.