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SUPPLEMENT OF TIMES CITIZEN
& ACKLEY WORLD JOURNAL
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Pull up a chair

Chairish Life's always got a seat

BY SHAWN DIGITY | sdigity@iafalls.com

Chairish Life Coffee Shop's message is hidden right in plain sight. Its name is a double entendre, and with that double meaning it offers two sides of the Ackley coffee shop's story: what makes the storefront unique to the Roelfs family and what they aspire to do with the shop's presence in Ackley.

In talks with Megan Roelfs and her daughter Maliah on one cold January day, the atmosphere of Chairish Life was already on full display. Patrons were visiting with friends and having a good time, and others were quietly working on their laptops. The visitors were scattered around in different pockets of the coffee shop, and shelves of locally created and curated artisan knick-knacks and tchotchkes were strewn about as well.

Megan stated that they really wanted to build a "comfortable" and "inviting" environment at Chairish Life, and with the bright lighting, plant life, and background laughter, signs were already pointing to that being the case.

The Chairish Life name is indeed a pun, according to Megan, and it harkens back to her teenage years when she started refinishing furniture in high school — but chairs, specifically. "When I was in high school, I started refinishing furniture, and so I started collecting chairs — furniture, but in particular chairs. Everywhere I go, I see chairs, I think, 'What a nice chair.' Everywhere I go, I pick up a new chair."

And everywhere you go in Chairish Life, there's a new chair; dozens of them of all shapes and sizes are scattered, waiting for the coffee shop's motto to be actualized. "Our tagline is 'Sit, sip and savor community...,' Megan shared. "Our goal was to have a place where the community could come and sit and gather and... that's kind of our mission, to bring a place to the community, to show God's love to the community by having this welcoming atmosphere. We've really been able to do that."



PHOTOS BY SHAWN DIGITY / TIMES CITIZEN

The Roelfs family is made up of Matt, Megan (pictured right), Madigan, Maliah (left), Max, Mitchell, Maielle, Merritt, and Matther.

However, the coffee shop's healthy dose of variegated chairs was not curated overnight. According to Megan, she and her family's war chest of chairs were accumulating in their barn — and that's when the idea struck her. "This is perfect," she said. "We'll call it Chairish Life."

At that point, the Roelfs had the necessary furniture and the play on words, but they needed to work in their mission, their calling. "We cherish life; we think God gave us life, and we need to use it to glorify him to the best of our ability.. It goes along with the makers that we are mirroring the creator in our creation. And so,

along with all that, the chairs are kind of a manifestation for me of that, creating and making because I refinish them, and we pick them up, and we clean them up, and sometimes I'll strip them down and refinish them... So that's what all that came out of," Megan explained.

In early 2021, when the Roelfs acquired the building in downtown Ackley, they had to use a similar strategy of cleaning, stripping, and refinishing to transform the former eye doctor's office into what's now Chairish Life.

"It was dark," Megan stated. "We demo-ed the whole inside, and we took three roll-away dumpsters full of stuff

out here." The reconstruction became a family affair, and Megan quipped, "For Christmas that year, our kids got respirators and tool belts. And so they were very involved in the whole process of tearing everything out." The family has now had the coffee shop in operation for about a year and a half.

One of Megan's daughters, Maliah, was also on hand, and she explained her daughter's background and how she fits into the family business.

"Food is her love," Megan stated. "It was really great that she could have that experience and bring that experience of working at an upscale restaurant to here."

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Chairish Life is a family affair. Pictured are Megan Roelfs in the middle, her son, Mitchell and her daughter, Maliah.

Maliah, now in charge of much of the cuisine at Chairish Life, gained that invaluable cooking and food service experience at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif., near Pebble Beach, where she worked at least 70-hour weeks as a sous chef at one point in time. Now she helps with the ever-changing menu at the coffee shop.

Chairish Life offers several monthly drink specials and has a full espresso bar, cold brews and specialty teas. While some of their purveyors are located in Waterloo or Cedar Falls, the coffee shop tries to keep it close to home. "We're trying to be as local as we can," Maliah stated.

In addition to the drink and food menus, Chairish Life also features various unique vintage items: statues and figurines, glassware, jewelry, rustic and farm memorabilia and Americana. They also have engraved Chairish Life swag: cookbook holders, bags, clothing, games, water bottles and coffee mugs.

The engraved memorabilia, food, and drinks are all done internally; Megan added, "We do all that in-house. We make everything in-house; all the baked goods are made from scratch in-house. So we serve baked goods, different ones daily, fresh daily, and then we also serve sandwiches. And we got a soup every day. Sandwiches, soups salads."

Megan and company try to use locally grown vegetables when crafting food at the coffee shop; one example is the potato soup, with the spuds all coming from the Roelfes' very own gardens. "It just tastes better," Megan mentioned.

She also explained that they had been kicking the tires on collaborating with more nearby farms and growers to ensure that all their dishes are fresh and from local sources, but sometimes it's easier said

than done. "We happen to have our own garden, so that works out great, but sometime in the future, that would be something I would try [working with more local farmers]," Megan stated.

Moving into 2023 and beyond, she had some things that she'd like to focus on: "Things I'd like to improve is just trying to make sure we maintain balance for our staff because food service is a very demanding [industry]. We require a high degree of excellence in service. And to do that takes a lot of energy. We want people that are engaging with our clientele, kind people that are polite and kind... Because everybody deserves that. Because that's how we're trying to show God's love to the community. You come in here. We're not going to spell your name wrong on purpose; we're not going to be ornery with you."

And Maliah added to that, "If your food is good, but your customer service is bad, no one's [going to come back]. What brings people back is the engaging," Maliah stated. "Yep," Megan agreed.

They both want to maintain the excellence they've built since their opening in 2021 because it's a part of what they love about having the coffee shop. "The regulars that we have, they really make this job a blessing to me. That's what makes it worth it pretty much," Maliah expressed.

In some ways, the mother-daughter combo wants the coffee shop to be a beacon of kindness and generosity in the community by creating a culture of radiance through themselves and their staff, where they can be a bright spot in Ackley. "We want to be that light... Be a light in Ackley, with excellence in our food," Megan stated. "Excellence in everything," Maliah declared. "My goal is to treat people how I want to be

treated," Megan added.

"We saw an opportunity for the community," Megan shared. That opportunity came, in its earliest ideation, in December 2020. But it didn't become more of a reality until February 2021, when Megan and her family acquired the downtown building from the Ackley Development Committee. And when officially opening in July '21, it was the direction that they were led in, according to Megan. "God just kind of said, 'This is what you're doing next,'" and led us into the next thing. So this was kind of a surprise... It's more of a vocation than it is an occupation."

The building was in for a surprise, too; the former optometrist's office was rough around the edges in many ways. That is to say, it had too many edges, walls, buffers, and boundaries. There was too much in the way, not conducive to the welcoming, warm environment the Roelfses sought. But, if you've seen Chairish Life already, there are not a lot of those things in the way anymore. The open space in the coffee shop has plenty of room to cherish life, friends, family, and the community — and plenty of seats to chairish it as well. ■

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Changemaker

Duds doing the Suds has an idea for progress in 2023 and beyond

BY SHAWN DIGITY | sdigity@iafalls.com

Located at 205 Railroad St. in Iowa Falls, the entrance to the new Duds doing the Suds laundromat is just right around the corner. Entering the facility, which is part of the Graphics Plus building, holds no surprises; it's a laundromat, after all.

It possessed the most significant pieces that every laundry business needs: a wall of sleek and shiny stainless steel dryers and, on the opposite side of the room, about a baker's dozen of accompanying washers. Though, in this case, many community members might recognize the washers and dryers. They used to be housed in an older laundromat where the Scooter's drive-thru sits today.

Owner Tim Hartkopp took the reins last year and transplanted the equipment into a new facility after Randy Jennings, the owner of the old spot on North Oak Street, sold it. The machinery in Duds doing the Suds is exactly the same as the former laundromat, outside a few chairs, but it's the spiritual successor to Randy Jennings' old site. Hartkopp spent the early months of last year getting the new place up and running and officially opened its doors on April 1, 2022.

"It was a little slow at first," he said, adding that the new place might've been more challenging to find after the prior site was right on one of Iowa Falls' main thoroughfares. The old facility was likely more noticeable, being along a highway and having built-in at-a-glance advertising for the coming and going traffic. The old building might've had a prime location, but it still came with some trade-offs — like discretion. Hartkopp mentioned that the new site is a little more tucked away and provides a greater perception of privacy for the patrons who might not want to be seen or spoken to while they do their laundry.

It might've been slow going at first, but it's since picked up now that Hartkopp's closing in on a full year as the owner. "The summer was really good. We put a float in the parade to kind of let people know we're here... And then, it's been, year-over-year, from about July on, we've been better than the last couple years at his [Randy Jennings] laundromat."

And so far, as Hartkopp shared, he's heard positive remarks about the laundromat's new life: "We've had a couple comments that this is one of



PHOTOS BY SHAWN DIGITY / TIMES CITIZEN

Owner Tim Hartkopp has mostly Dexter-brand washers and dryers in his facility. He praised the company for being able to help with maintenance in the event that he himself couldn't fix something.

the cleaner laundromats they've been in. And they like how easy it is to get into and out of." It's discreet for visitors who wish to have a certain degree of secrecy, yet it's also convenient for dropoffs, with an alley running right past its front entrance and ramps leading to the door.

And with that convenience, what would sound like an arduous move — with the hefty washers and dryers and all — actually went over pretty well, in Hartkopp's account. "We just knocked it out," he shared, noting the move was measured in hours, and not in longer increments.

Between him, his father (who drove truck between the two sites), and about 10 other community willing-and-ables, the machines were all transferred in a single morning. "We had ramps going out and ramps coming in. We set her up pretty good," he stated.

Speaking of setup, it's different than the old laundromat in its orientation and required some reconstruction. Serendipitously, Hartkopp has a background as a handyman; through his wide-array,

jack-of-all-trades skillset, he was able to do a lot of the laundromat's renovations on his own.

Earlier in his career, he moved to Texas and worked in the pool-building industry, where he added several feathers to his cap at a unique crossroads of plumbing, electrical, construction and masonry work. "This isn't that different," he explained. "And this is just simple electronics and heating elements... and motors and pumps. It's everything I've dealt with."

So adding new walls, for example, wasn't that big of a hurdle for Hartkopp as he brought the laundromat up to snuff. In fact, outside a waiting game for the power company to get him hooked up, he didn't face very many stumbling blocks at all; "there weren't really major obstacles," he declared.

It wasn't a seamless transition, though. The old laundromat closed in February 2022, and it took several weeks of red tape and delays to get the appropriate amperage hooked up — what could've been Hartkopp's largest problem to date. Since then, operations have been relatively smooth.



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Ronnie Eason (foreground) makes change while at the laundromat, and Steve Neumeyer (back) reads his Bible while waiting for his clothes to finish.



Located right across the street from The River Tap, the restaurant makes for a prime location for laundromat patrons to kill time with some food and drink during their wait.

As Hartkopp continued, there's not much progress to be made on a laundromat once you have washers and dryers; he already has the two most vital assets running in good condition.

And in addition, what could be considered progressive or innovative for a laundromat might not razzle-dazzle the general public. As far as progress, though, Hartkopp did have one potential thought for the future: "I would like to, at some point in time, change it over to more debit-card-friendly stuff." That pro isn't without its con, though, he continued. "That's pretty expensive. And for a small town and the size of business this, I don't know if that's really feasible. But I know it's going to have to happen in the near future, at least get a change machine that accepts debit cards or credit cards to give change. But we'll see." Making strides at Duds doing the Suds might be as simple as adding credit card options as opposed to just the cash-for-coins exchange.

Hartkopp clarified, though, that the laundromat wasn't some cash grab. As a born-and-raised Iowa Falls native, he saw an opportunity to provide a service from which the city would benefit. Come hell or high water, a local laundromat can be a boon to a neighborhood if a personal appliance goes awry. "The community needed it. This isn't going to make me rich," he added. So, Tim Hartkopp, owner of Iowa Falls' Duds doing the Suds, with a wealth of handyman knowledge, just looked for a way to enrich the community instead. ■

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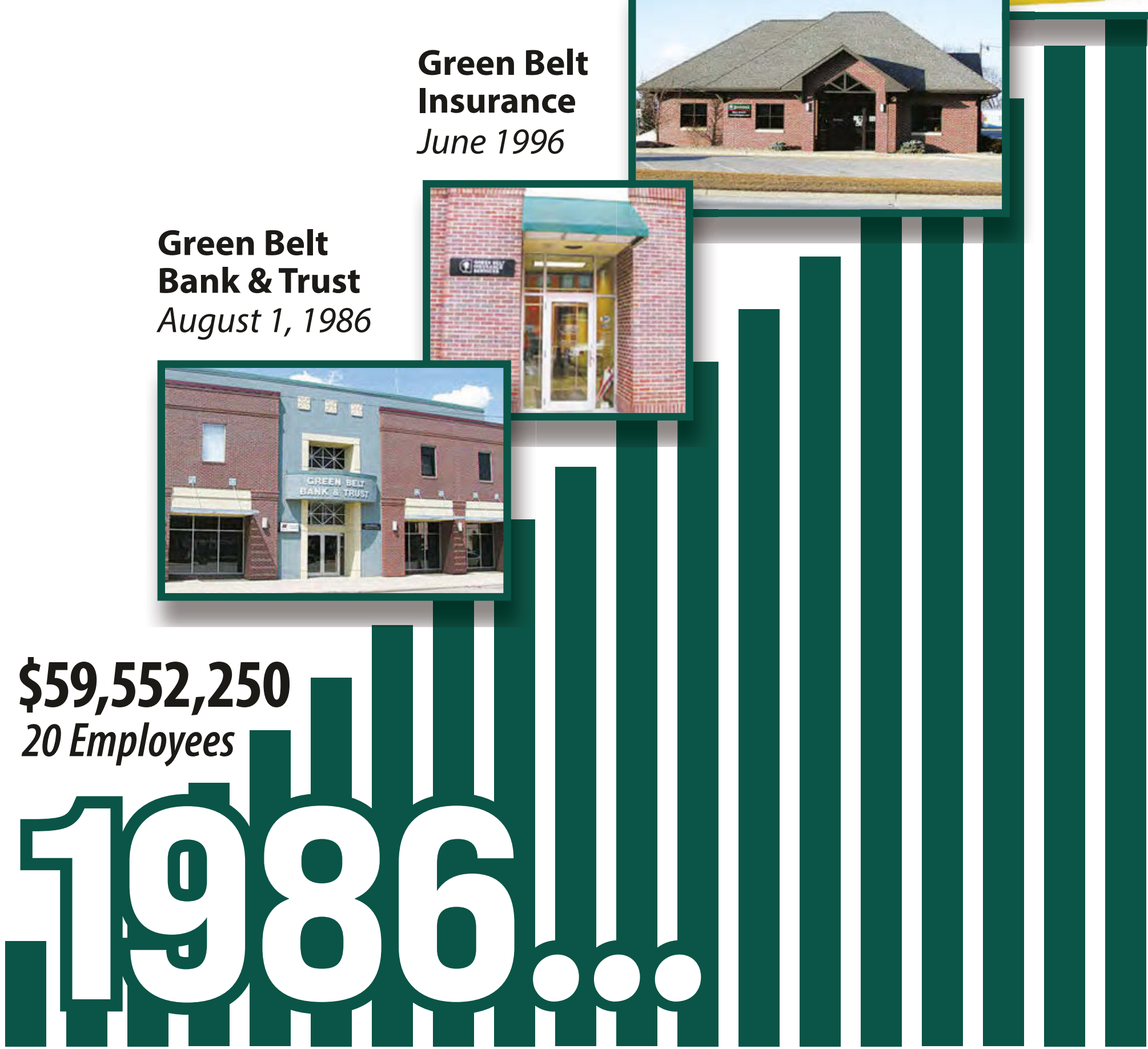


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Quilting a dream job

BECKY SCHIPPER | news@iafalls.com

Strategy is a word that many new business owners take when opening and it's a word which best describes how those new businesses around the area have approached their dreams over the past two years.

For Holly and Mitch Meyer – owners of Juniper Jane Little Quilt Shop and MR Agency – their dream wasn't born of the textbook definition of strategy. Rather it is intermingled with words like providence and destiny.

It all began in 2016 with Mitch joining RZ Agency, more recently working from an office in the couple's home. Along with farming, Mitch grew his insurance agency literally at the dining room table. With four children, the home was full – filing cabinets in the piano room and bedroom, and feeling a need for privacy for his clients, he moved his office to the farm where he remained for four years.

The business continued to grow as their four children grew. It was time to consider a space that felt less residential, and more professional.

Holly, a former Family Consumer Science instructor, grew too. Sewing, once a challenging aspect of her position, quickly became one of the most rewarding parts of her position. She'd purchased a long-arm machine for quilting and managed to fit it into their rural home. Space was tight while her dream of owning a quilt shop continued to grow.

Holly admits that her vision had begun with more of a 'downtown' feel. To fulfill that feeling, the couple looked closely at downtown options in both Ackley and Iowa Falls, eventually deciding that Ackley was where they needed to focus their search.

Over the years, the couple had driven by 420 Sherman, the former Kum and Go building, hundreds of times. They realized it was a good location – a busy corner, one of the busiest in town so visibility wouldn't be a problem. After searching their hearts and considering their options, they realized the structure was large enough to hold both businesses.

They put in an offer on the property near Labor Day 2021, waiting an entire month before getting any response. It wasn't until late November that the realtor their own realtor had been talking with, reached out with news that they were looking for the abstract.

While they'd hoped to have fall and early winter to work on the building – time when Mitch's business and farming obligations were slower, it wasn't going to happen.

As all this was taking place Mitch fell ill with Covid, receiving infusions three times a day. It wasn't until December that he started feeling well enough that renovations could begin. But they were running out of that precious 'down-time' that they'd hoped to use for the renovations.

They finally gained possession of the property in January of 2022.

They'd turned on the water turned so their work could begin, and before things could



PHOTOS BY BECKY SCHIPPER / TIMES CITIZEN

Holly Meyer stands at the cutting table which, along with other pieces in the shop, carry with it a little Ackley history. The table once served as the mixing table in the local bakery.



The long-arm quilting machine may look intimidating, but Holly assures her customers that new experiences are the best parts of life. The machine is available to rent at Juniper Jane Little Quilt Shop in Ackley.

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MR Agency, located in the same building as Juniper Jane Little Quilt Shop, has its own entrance. Mitch Meyer is enjoying the space and the ability to have the privacy he needs for his clients.



A station for cutting fabric, ironing and design wall are just some of the amenities customers can enjoy at the shop.



Sewing and quilting supplies, classes, demonstrations, workshops, and all things material to the art are on hand in the store. Along with supplies, Holly Meyer can aid her customers through her years of experience.

progress, along came a cold snap.

Once they'd taken possession, it was on to bigger things. Two large front windows needed to be replaced, a second entrance added so that MR Agency would have its own entrance, A/C and furnace work – the list goes on.

Thankfully, much of the work was cosmetic and getting the materials needed to complete it wasn't nearly as difficult as it could have been. Covid may have halted much of the world, but it did not halt the couple's progress. They did much of the work themselves therefore having less reliance on contractors.

Some work was delayed, not so much by the contractors who did take part, more on waiting for parts deliveries. Still, it did slow the project.

As they progressed with the renovations, the

question on what to do with the coolers inside began to rear its ugly head.

That same day they chose to take part in the local Legion fish fry, something they admittedly hadn't done in a very long time. There, they noticed a jar labeled 'Donations for Cooler.' The rest is history, so they say. The old coolers were quickly donated for the good of the community and were promptly out of the couple's way. Work on the building could continue.

"It's been fun," Holly said, referring to the families which have welcomed them to the community's array of businesses. "They've been very supportive, serving like a 'Welcome Wagon' of sorts." Those visits, even from those who don't sew or need insurance, are encouraging and it makes her happy to have people walk in.

She's a little more relaxed now that the shelves of Juniper Jane Little Quilt Shop are stocked. She first began looking at fabric companies in the spring of 2020, and while there were some delays, she's been happy with the delivery times for the most part, choosing companies which allow smaller quantities and carry the designers she knows and loves.

Her portion of the building houses many opportunities for quilting fanatics – from quilting classes, those taught by herself, and others with expertise in apparel and handbags, for instance are in the works.

Her space includes a cutting station, ironing station, design wall, a kitchenette for longer class days, a quilt fitting room, and of course, her long-arm.

Holly doesn't do the long-arm quilting for her customers, rather shows how the machine operates and then rents it out by the hour.

"We're only on this planet once, why not have new experiences!" she said.

Along with fabric and quilting supplies, she offers Janome machines, machine service, and scissor sharpening (through another company – drop off and pick up at Juniper Jane).

Both businesses are now open – Mitch relies on hours by appointment; Holly has set hours – Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Fridays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. And of course, by appointment. She's faithful about letting customers know any updates to hours on her social media page 'Juniper Jane Little Quilt Shop'.

The days that Holly isn't open are used for classes and workshops, machine demonstrations and more, allowing her time to focus on her very important guests. ■

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CASE II

Medical care on YourTime

Rachuy opens urgent care and wellness center

BY MARISSA VANWINGEN
mvanwingen@iafalls.com

Melissa Rachuy is naturally a nurturing person. She enjoys taking care of people. This year, she opened YourTime Urgent Care and Wellness Center in downtown Iowa Falls.

"I think I just love taking care of people," Rachuy said. "I think I am a nurturer and I relate well to people and it's just in my blood. I definitely feel like I'm doing what I was meant to do."

Rachuy is originally from Minnesota and moved to Iowa Falls in 1997 to go to nursing school at Ellsworth Community College. She graduated with her ADN in 1999 and worked as a nurse for almost 20 years. She decided to go back for her nurse practitioner degree.

She has always had an entrepreneurial mindset. Over the years, she had a scrub store in town as well as one in Ankeny. She closed those to get back into nursing. Two years after having her ARNP, the surgeon she was working for retired and Rachuy was trying to decide what to do next. She had always thought there was a need for an urgent care in Iowa Falls and things just kind of fell into place.

Her original location was off the beaten path and hard to find, and then the building next to Jennings Reality became available.

"It was such perfect timing," she said. "We were looking and this just happened to be open and I talked to Randy Jennings on a Thursday and signed the lease on Saturday. It just fell into our laps perfectly."

"We have such great visibility here, it's such a great spot. I really got lucky," Rachuy added.

They officially opened full-time on Aug. 15.

One of the biggest things for Rachuy was giving people another option outside of going to the emergency room or having to make



Melissa Rachuy opened YourTime Urgent Care and Wellness Center earlier this year. While she has several receptionists and Heather Wayman (CMA) helping, she would like to have a second provider.

appointments between 8 a.m. -5 p.m., Monday through Friday. YourTime Medical is open from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Friday, Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 12-4 p.m.

"I think the most rewarding thing is the positive feedback from the community. Everybody's very grateful that we're here, they love the extended hours. Just hearing that positive feedback coming back is super rewarding," she said. "This is super convenient to be open a little bit later and then the weekend hours have really been beneficial as well."

Along with urgent care and referrals, there is a wellness side to the business as well. They will do vitamin infusions, aesthetic



As an ARNP, Melissa Rachuy can do a most things. She will refer patients to specialists if she thinks the issue is above what she can do.



MARISSA VANWINGEN / TIMES CITIZEN

Along with urgent care services, YourTime Medical also offers aesthetic procedures, they offer a message therapist as well as vitamin infusions.

procedures such as micro-needling, Botox, chemical peels and fillers. There is also a massage therapist, Madi Meyer.

"I just think that there is definitely a void in that area here in this community. People are traveling to Ames, Des Moines, Cedar Falls for things like that. There's no reason we can't have that right here," Rachuy said. "I think that's an area where we have not focused on getting the word out that we do that. A lot of people don't know that we do that."

There is little as an ARNP that Rachuy can't do. She can prescribe, do stitches and basically anything a family practice does. She does not do primary care.

"If I think something is above and beyond me, I will absolutely refer out to a specialist," she said.

The biggest challenge has been supply issues. Ever since Covid, there has been a supply chain is not what it was. Luckily, they have been able to get everything they need - just have to plan ahead a little bit. Staffing has also been difficult, but she has Heather Wayman, who is a medical assistant and can run patients, give

shots, take vitals and do testing. Rachuy would like to get another provider with an ARNP.

"Staffing is rough and just getting the word out. What is the best way to spend your advertising dollars, that has been a challenge. Just letting everybody know that we're here," Rachuy said. "Otherwise, I think that our workload is pretty good. We try and get people in and out and seen, they don't want to spend two hours here, and we don't want that either. It's challenging to be a one-man show, but I have great office staff, but in the end I'm the one who has to be here and when you open a business you do it because you love it. I knew it was going to be a rough few months."

As far as the future, Rachuy has hopes to make YourTime Medical an Iowa Falls staple.

"We have a plan to pass this down to our kids and it's here in the community forever," she said. "We have not ruled out opening more locations in the future. We would like to be more involved in the community. Find where we can give back once we're more established." ■

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Metropolitan Opera House and Theatre manager, Marina Lindsay, has been working at the met since 2015. Movie theaters were forced to close during the pandemic.

Back to the movies

Theaters seeing resurgence

BY MARISSA VANWINGEN | mvanwingen@iafalls.com

When the world was shutting down in 2020, movie theaters had even added stresses.

Every theater was forced to close its doors from mid-March until May. But even after re-opening, there were other obstacles. Movies were being delayed because they couldn't film. Everything was being delayed. While theaters could show older movies, not enough people were going to them to pay for their screen time and many were relying on to-go sales of popcorn and snacks.

The Metropolitan Opera House and Theatre in Iowa Falls shut down for seven months. Then it started to come back – things remained in limbo. Were the suppliers still in business?

For smalltown theaters like the Met and the Grand Theatre in Eldora, it's all about selling themselves.

"We have to sell ourselves as more of an experience now," said Met manager Marina Lindsay. "The experience hasn't changed much, technology has gotten better but the experience itself we try and keep as best we can to be



Movies like "Top Gun: Maverick" and "Avatar" were big for theaters this year. Those blockbusters brought people back to the seats at local movie theaters.

accommodating for people that want to come in. It's getting harder with the more competition we get."

Lindsay has been working at the Met since 2015 and has been the manager since 2021 when they reopened.

When theaters were given the okay to reopen, they only operated at half capacity or 75 percent to make sure there was enough room for people to spread out and stay six feet apart. Since then, the busy days have changed. Lindsay said it used to be Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Now there is a huge rush on Friday and Saturday anymore. The average crowd for all the showings are larger.

The number of seats sold really depends on the movies they bring in.

"They are starting to pick up and go back to what our old numbers used to be. And like 'Avatar', that was a really good movie for us because we saw a lot of our numbers back. Along with 'Top Gun: Maverick'. We had a large average crowd for 'Top Gun: Maverick' the whole time we had it. That was nice to see our old numbers coming back," Lindsay said. "I know we anticipate our upcoming Marvel movies to do as well."

While the Met hasn't had any issues finding workers – they employ mostly high school students – the Grand Theater is run by volunteers.

Dave Rubow has been the manager for the last 10-15 years as a volunteer. He had two shift managers that would take care of daily operations, and those were paid positions. Longtime shift manager Curt Wical passed away November of 2020 and the other shift manager found fulltime employment. There has been no paid staff. Instead, there has been a revolving group of 10-12 volunteers that have been filling the shift manager positions and organizing the other volunteers.

"That's a testament to our community and the volunteer spirit. We always knew when we reopened the theater almost 30 years ago that we would have a paid position or two and the idea was to then have volunteers help with the concessions and help with the selling of tickets and help cleaning up afterwards," Rubow said. "When we first opened the theater back then, we thought we can maybe do that for a year or two, and then interest will wain and we will have to add more paid positions. Now almost 30 years later, we have an almost constant supply of volunteers."

With the cost of everything going up, so have some of the prices at the movie theater. For the first time since 2013, the Met had to raise their ticket prices. Some of the candy has gone up as well.

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"Movie companies always take a percentage of our sales, so a lot of times we don't keep a lot of the ticket sales. We make a lot of our money in our concessions. On average that I've seen, they haven't raised a whole lot," said Lindsay. "It depends on the movie really, because it changes per movie. Each movie can take more or less of our ticket sales, depending. It's also, it's a subtle factor in what I choose. I always try to get movies that I know will do well and those normally aren't bad cost wise. More often than not, the ones that are really popular pay for themselves so we don't have to worry too much."

The Eldora theater hasn't had to raise ticket prices, but they have had to adjust concession prices as the price of pop continually has gone up and the cooking oil for popcorn has increased. There also continues to be a shortage of waxed buttered popcorn bags.

"You couldn't find them anywhere for a time period. We finally had to go back to buttered popcorn tubs, which they're probably more convenient, but they are more expensive and they take up a whole lot more garbage space," said Rubow. "There was a shortage of tubs for a long time too so we were down to, I think, one size of buttered popcorn for a while, until the supplies came back because we just couldn't get the container to put it in."

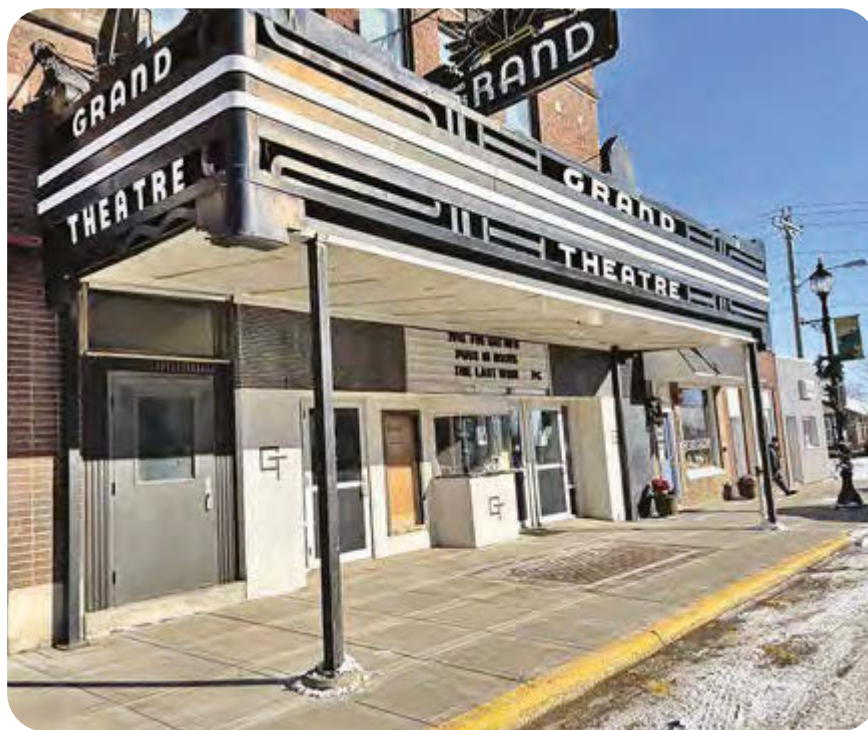
As far as what the future holds, small and locally owned theaters are at the mercy of the movie companies and what they release and how they release them.

"We're kind of at the mercy of movie companies and what they release. We could offer different things, like services, (but) I hope to stay purely a movie theater in the future. The future is always kind of a mystery. We just kind of go with whatever is going on," said Lindsay. "At least they (attendance) are progressively getting better. We're slowly getting back to what we used to see number-wise. We're getting back to normal, per say. As normal as we can get after COVID, and I'm hoping that it just keeps getting better over time."

Their biggest competition has been streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and many others. It used to be that companies would wait at least a month before they released them to streaming companies, but now that is not the case. Some are released at the same time or shortly after.



Dave Rubow has been a volunteer manager of the Grand Theatre in Eldora for more than a decade. Along with having to shut down due to the pandemic, streaming services have also taken people out of theaters.



The Grand Theatre hasn't raised ticket prices, but some of the concession items are more expensive. They also had to switch to tubs of popcorn.

"As far as I can see, from our average numbers, it has kind of impacted us – depending on the movie," Lindsay said. "If a movie company decides to release a movie on streaming as well as theaters, we don't do as well. Because people can sit at home and watch it and they don't have to come in. Which, sometimes that's something people like to do."

Similar to when VCRs became popular and then DVDs, Rubow believes streaming will also be cyclical.

"Just this week Netflix announced that they are going to be cracking down on shared passwords. Where multiple different households are using one membership to stream for several households," he said. "We knew that would happen as soon as they saturated the market, they would start cracking down on that. I'm sure all the streaming services will start doing that. Households are going to start getting subscription fatigue. All of sudden we are paying for how many streaming services and you start looking at your bottom line, and paying this much every month to do that. Hopefully that will again drive people back to the theaters and that's what we're kind of counting on." ■

PHOTOS BY MARISSA VANWINGEN / TIMES CITIZEN

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Jerrae Lindsey's Uncle Jay's Barbering Co. business has locations in both Clive and Iowa Falls. He is at the Scenic City location two times per week.

Cut above the rest

Uncle Jay's Barbering Co thriving in Iowa Falls

BY JUSTIN ITES | ites@iafalls.com

Jerrae Lindsey started to lean the tools of his trade at the young age of nine. The owner of Uncle Jay's Barbering Co. cut his own hair as a youth and never stopped.

Now, Lindsey owns and operates a thriving business that has locations in Clive and Iowa Falls. Offering the customer a unique experience is one his primary goals.

"I like that feeling when I have that kid in my chair and halfway through the transformation, he gets a glimpse of that in the mirror. His face lights up and we are not even done yet. People walk in the shop one way and walk out chipper and happy," Lindsey said. "Where I am in this business, I have an opportunity for others to provide for their families."

Running a barber operation became challenging when the Covid pandemic forced businesses to shutter their doors for an uncomfortable period in 2020. Lindsey realized the affects of that decision in multiple ways. One, his primary source of income was deleted to zero dollars coming in, and two, he became very sick after contracting the virus.

"They shut us down for two months and we couldn't be open. I deleted my savings account at that time," Lindsey said.

He had traveled back and forth to a church convention in Kansas multiple times. At that time, Lindsey began feeling sick, but chalked his health up to all of the traveling. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds announced that businesses - including barber shops - were being shut down for an indefinite period of time. Lindsey said his



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN ITES / TIMES CITIZEN

The Covid pandemic challenged barbers such as Jerrae Lindsey, but his business is thriving now.

symptoms began to worsen and then he found out it was Covid. He was hospitalized twice and nearly died.

"It was very bad, and that's why you won't hear me say it is a hoax or any of that," Lindsey said. "My wife got it bad too. I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. No one

really had a full understanding of the virus at that time. I hated that we got shut down, but now I'm glad they did. I could have gone to work and infected a lot of my customers."

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Lindsey's Uncle Jay's Barbering Co. location in Clive staffs 15-17 people, which made paying the bills a rough go during the time the business was forced to close its doors. He explained that his landlord still wanted to get paid on time, which forced him to delve into his savings account. He said finding a part-time job for money was also out of the question at the time, because he was so sick. Then he had to care for his wife.

"Business-wise, it made me realize that anything can happen at any time. As an owner, you have to have a safety net and security. When we opened back up, people were darn near busting my door down. There were restrictions and people had to wear masks and we couldn't do beard work because of that. Probably 80-85 percent of barber licenses in Iowa consist of sanitation. Iowa law is probably 80 percent sanitation," Lindsey said. "All the protocols the CDC was putting out, we were required to do anyway."

Lindsey did not receive official training for his profession until he enrolled in barber school back in 2017. He learned the ins, outs and basics of cutting straight hair. Coming from a predominantly African American community, he wanted to learn more sheer techniques to make expand his skill set.

Uncle Jay's Barbering Co. has now been in existence for nearly four years. Getting a team of people that are like-minded and on the same page was his primary goal when opening the business.

There are six people on Lindsey's staff and they all specialize in something different. Services include haircuts, beard trims, facial massages and traditional shaves.

After opening the Clive location, a connection to the Iowa Falls area opened up a door to expand his business to the rural Iowa community.

"I have friends that purchased an acreage outside of Alden. One of them asked me if I wanted to cut hair in Iowa Falls? I'm thought that would be great because every other month I have a client that lives near the UNI (University of Northern Iowa) campus in Cedar Falls," Lindsey said.

At that point, he was told that Iowa Falls was not Cedar Falls.

"I didn't know anything about Iowa Falls, but come August, it will be two years here," Lindsey said.

Jay's Barbering Co. is open Mondays and Thursdays in the Scenic City. While he accepts walk-ins, most of his customers book appointments online at the business



While six people are on Lindsey's staff in Clive, he is a one-man crew during his days in Iowa Falls.

website - www.unclejaysbarbering.com.

Lindsey completes anywhere from eight to 10 haircuts per day while he is in Iowa Falls. Besides haircuts, he also does a lot of beard trimming.

"One thing that is in right now that some may consider crazy are mullets. I also have a skin care line of beard products that I formulated myself. A lot of people love those and go hand-in-hand with beard services. I use 100 percent pure and organic products and a combo of oils that doesn't clog your pores," Lindsey said.

Word of mouth helped promote Uncle Jay's Barbering Co's presence in the Scenic City. Lindsey said while his customer base in Clive is more diverse, he's gotten to know a lot of people during his less-than-two-year stay in Iowa Falls.

Lindsey said Uncle Jay's Barbering Co's motto is 'Experience the Difference.'

"I tell people you go to the barber shop to get a

haircut, but you come to Uncle Jay's for an experience. The vibe is going to be right. We keep it professional, but we have music playing. We embody some of those key things that existed within traditional barbering. That is not around as much anymore, but still do straight razor shaves with hot towels and oils. You can get facials and all those things," Lindsey said.

While some barbering trends have changed over the years, Lindsey believes more people will focus on the manufacturing of their own tools and products.

"I would love to make the perfect clipper someday. I could see the big box clipper manufacturers out of business one day," Lindsey said.

To make an appointment at Uncle Jay's Barbering Co. visit www.unclejaysbarbering.com and click on the Iowa Falls or Clive link. Lindsey's business also has a social media presence on Instagram and Facebook. The business number is 515-505-3289. ■

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Kelsi Bahr went to college with dreams of becoming a police officer, but her photography business has put those plans on hold.

Memories through a lens

Bahr building photography business

BY JUSTIN ITES | ites@iafalls.com

Many of Kelsi Bahr's friends did a double-take when she started promoting her new photography business - Kelsi Kay Photography - on several social media outlets.

While her acquaintances were happy for Bahr's new endeavor, they admitted to being a bit confused.

During her high school years, Bahr had always indicated an interest in becoming a police officer. She expanded on those dreams by obtaining her criminal justice degree following stints at Ellsworth Community College and Des Moines Area Community College.

But at some point, life got in the way

and caused her to detour to a new plan.

While the 2018 Iowa Falls-Alden High School graduate said working in the police force may still happen in the future, she's 100 percent all-in with building her current photography business.

Starting Kelsi Kay Photography in the middle of the Covid pandemic created a few obstacles, but none serious enough to derail her dream.

A few months ago, Bahr made the decision to rent a building in the downtown area (420 Washington Ave.) where she has the ability to create a studio in order to take a variety of indoor portraits.

"It's nice to have my own space and not pay an hourly fee. I can easily double my income from having this studio," Bahr said. "I had to paint the whole space, which is about 2,000 square feet. The advantages of having my own studio is that I am able to offer more. Indoors, I can do min-sessions like Christmas shoots for 15 minute sessions. I put up a Christmas backdrop.

I photograph newborns at the studio because most people don't like shooting in their homes."

Bahr said she also offers a client closet, which includes a variety of different clothing for women, men and newborns.

The business has really taken off during the past few years, and she is busy photographing weddings, senior portraits and more. Bahr chuckles at the irony of where she thought her business path would take her, compared to where she is today.

Bahr said when she and her husband Luke decided to have children, a decision was made to temper her police officer goals.

"It really came down to either I work crazy hours and miss moments and holidays, or I find something else to do where I'm not taking my kids to a babysitter or the grandparents all the time. Luke works a swing shift at Cargill, and he works holidays and nights. It just wasn't the right time to pursue the police officer dream."

The Bahrs lived in Ankeny for a two-year stretch (2019-2021), but during that

time, they also moved to Texas for six months (2020) so Luke could work with Bahr's mother. They quickly discovered an affinity for being in the Midwest.

"Texas seemed more like a vacation spot for us, and Iowa just felt like home, so we came back and eventually moved back to Iowa Falls," Bahr said. "During our short time in Texas, I stayed home with our first child because Luke was working. I feel like I'm a creative person and was bored so one day I decided to buy a camera, got on YouTube and started watching several videos on photography."

Following a couple mentorships through another photographer online, Bahr felt comfortable enough with camera settings and the photo editing process. She began to offer free sessions for families in Texas. That occurred over a two-month span.

After returning to Iowa, Bahr was able to do a styled shoot for a wedding and other events.

"Other photographers and businesses would put a styled shoot together and we would go there and shoot the models," Bahr said. "Even today, I'm still learning

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things about my camera. It's not something you learn right away. Lighting is always a challenge. To get comfortable, it took at least six months to a year. I did a recent engagement session and it was bright outside, where usually I shoot two hours before sunset."

Bahr decided to make Kelsi Kay photography official in October of 2021, and word of mouth spread quickly on Facebook and Instagram. She also has her own business website - www.kelsikayphoto.com.

One big advantage to moving to Iowa Falls and renting studio space is the fact that she doesn't have to pay to rent other photographer's studios. Bahr said now with two children, she felt daycare costs are cheaper in the Scenic City area than a bigger city such as Ankeny.

The challenge of shooting during the Covid pandemic also created a few obstacles, as Bahr admitted some people were more skittish about leaving their homes.

"A lot of people would request I wear a mask, while others were scared to get out in public again. That was an adjustment," Bahr said. "Bookings were slow at first, but they've picked up as people have become more comfortable."

Bahr already has 28 weddings on her schedule for the current year, but eventually, she wants to step away from those type of events. Weddings consume a lot of time depending on if they client books her for a six-, eight- or 10-hour block of time.

"Every couple is different. I get more traditional photo requests, while others tell me to make the decisions on what to photograph, other than those moments you have to shoot," Bahr said. "In my experiencing so far, knowing the client makes it a more comfortable experience because I think they are more honest with their feedback. I would rather know what worked and what didn't work as well. Weddings are trial-and-error. When clients book me, we discuss what they have in mind vision wise. I make it clear in the contract that I can't guarantee I will get every one of their requests. I go to so many different venues where some offer good natural light, or others that are all windows. You have to get comfortable where you



Finding studio space to rent on Washington Avenue has been a game-changer for Kelsi Bahr's photography business.



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN ITES / TIMES CITIZEN

are. Some places do not have good picture spots."

When her children are older, Bahr said she will have a tough decision to make. Those police officer dreams are always in the back of her mind, but for now, she's focused on building her photography operation.

"This business has turned out better than I ever expected that it would. Maybe I pursue the police work dream down the road, but for right now, I'm happy building on what I'm doing," Bahr said.

People can check out Kelsi Kay Photography at www.kelsikayphoto.com, or on Facebook and Instagram (@kelsikayphotography). ■

Editing photos takes up a lot of Bahr's time, and customers are eager to get early peeks at the images from her shoots.

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Left to right: Noah Oelmann, Scott Eisentrager, McKalee Eisentrager, McKade Eisentrager, Allison Willson, Casey Lindaman, Shawn Knights, Aaron Ackerman, Mason Eisentrager, Brandon Woodley

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Coming along swimmingly

Few issues face lengthy project

BY COREY MEINTS | cmeints@iafalls.com

The Hubbard Swimming Pool has been closed since the end of the 2019 season. It was kept together by smoke and mirrors at that point. Then Covid hit and the pool never opened in 2020. Disrepair to the pool - built in 1959 - forced it to stay closed through 2022.

Through a massive and lengthy fundraising effort, and countless planning meetings, swimmers in Hubbard will have a new pool this summer.

"There were a lot of issues," said Hubbard Mayor Marshall Simmerman. "It wasn't handicap assessable, the mechanicals had worn out, the heating equipment no longer repairable and there was loss of water."

With a budget of \$40,000 to \$45,000 annually for operations and salaries for a manager and six to seven lifeguards, those problems were handled as best they could be.

Discussion on replacing the pool had been ongoing since at least 2018 Simmerman said. Fundraising took off as the pool sat closed in 2020.

"People were inquisitive," Simmerman said. "They wanted to know why, what are the options, what is the estimated costs, etcetera. Questions were answered through public meetings and personal visits. We made multiple revisions of plans to keep costs in check."



Audrey Rieks and Marshall Simmerman have watched the Hubbard Pool project become a reality, she as the chairman of the Pool Community, and he as the Mayor of Hubbard.

The goal of raising \$1 million was set. It was reached late last summer. Work on the site began in October with an approved bid of \$3.1 million.

"Early estimates were \$2.7 million but bids came in \$3.7 million," Simmerman said. "We revised the plans and asked for new bids. We made at least three revisions and continue to look for ways to reduce costs."

The new pool will feature a toddler slide in the shallow

end, two diving boards, a basketball hoop, and a volleyball net. It will also feature all new mechanicals and a new poolhouse. Simmerman added that the pool will have more operational efficiencies and is designed and built to require fewer lifeguards, be handicap accessible, and safer.

"Work has continued to progress very well through the winter," Simmerman said. "Supply issues have been minimal to this point."

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PHOTOS BY COREY MEINTS / TIMES CITIZEN

The old Hubbard Swimming Pool has been closed since 2019, one of those years was due to a Covid shutdown, the others because of disrepair.



Work on the new Hubbard Swimming Pool began last fall with the demolition portion. A new pool, pool house and mechanical building should be open by June.



Work on the new Hubbard Swimming Pool has continued through the winter. The schedule is on track for a spring opening and is expected to be in time for the swimming season to begin in June.

As the construction process continues, the City is planning to seek staff for the summer beginning as early as February. Simmerman noted that there has been a lot of interest from potential manager and lifeguards.

“Both the contractor and engineer are optimistic the pool will be open in June 2023,” Simmerman said.

Simmerman has been a big part of the process, from sitting in on planning meetings to updating the City Council on progress. Admittedly, he said he had to be sold on the project before going to the Council. In the end, he felt it was always going to be an undertaking he and the Council could support.

“As mayor, I was asked to be a key part of the process,” Simmerman said. “The pool committee had to first ‘convince’ me before I could recommend the project to the City Council. I’m sure that frustrated the Pool Committee, but this is a big project and has taken many meetings and hours of planning both in design, financial planning, asking for donations, and applying for grants. We

needed to make sure we dotted the Is and crossed the Ts. I felt a responsibility to play a key role. I believe in the future of Hubbard and believe the new pool will be an asset that will provide economic benefits for the community.”

Simmerman said the whole process has been a testament to the people of Hubbard who always seem to rise to the occasion. When the City needed a new

library, citizens raised the money. When a new medical clinic was needed, people stepped up. When much of the business district was lost due to a gas explosion in 2000, citizens banded together to rebuild the only grocery store in town.

“Throughout the years, Hubbard has always been supportive of community projects,” Simmerman said. “Even going back to 1959 when the original pool was

built to the golf course, care center, library, medical clinic, grocery store, and arboretum just to name a few. It includes not only Hubbard citizens, but also those who grew up in Hubbard and moved away. It includes former business owners who have retired to other parts of the county. It includes connections the local people have with other business connections. It includes Hardin County and various businesses within the county and all who have graciously donated funds to make a new pool a reality. It’s about people and businesses who care about the future of Hubbard.” ■

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K&E Nutrition owner Kolette Kapp serves up healthy energy drinks, protein shakes, and protein oatmeal, all at 300 calories or less.

Finding a happy place

Kapp serving up healthy options at K&E Nutrition

BY ELAINE LORING | eloring@iafalls.com

Kolette Kapp opened K&E Nutrition eight months ago and is the “K” in her business name. The original plan was to open with her friend Elizabeth, the “E” in K&E, however, “Elizabeth was supposed to be my business partner, but she is active military. Shortly after we named our business and did all of those things, she was deployed to Poland. She had to take a step back from the business and really focus on her career,” Kapp said. “Now it’s just me.”

That small setback didn’t stop Kapp from continuing on with K&E Nutrition, and moving forward with opening her shop at 318 Stevens St. “I started doing what I’m doing now – at another nutrition club – right after Covid.

Covid was in March, and I started in July of 2020 at Healthy Strides in Mason City,” Kapp said. As an employee at Healthy Strides, she knew she eventually wanted to open her own shop, selling similar items. And in July 2022, she did just that.

“I grew up in Hampton and we used to come to Iowa Falls all the time and I really like the people in Iowa Falls,” she said. “The college is obviously a big benefit for me. Just all the activities going on... and Main Street, the Chamber and all the community events. We don’t have that many in Hampton.”

Although Kapp said Hampton does have their big Lighted Parade and Halloween Howl, she noted that Iowa Falls “has a lot of little fun things” that she enjoys.

K&E sells healthy protein shakes and healthy energy drinks. “We do have shakes that are hot and a protein oatmeal that is hot... and that’s nice and filling. The oatmeal is 300 calories or less and the shakes are 250



In the near future, signage similar to this will be in the window at K&E Nutrition, 318 Stevens St. in Iowa Falls.

calories or less. They are meant to be a full meal replacement.” When she first tried the products working in Mason City, it helped her drop about 25 pounds.

All of the energy drinks have less than a gram of sugar and she puts a B12 or B6 tablets in those drinks “and that’s like focus food for your brain,” she said.



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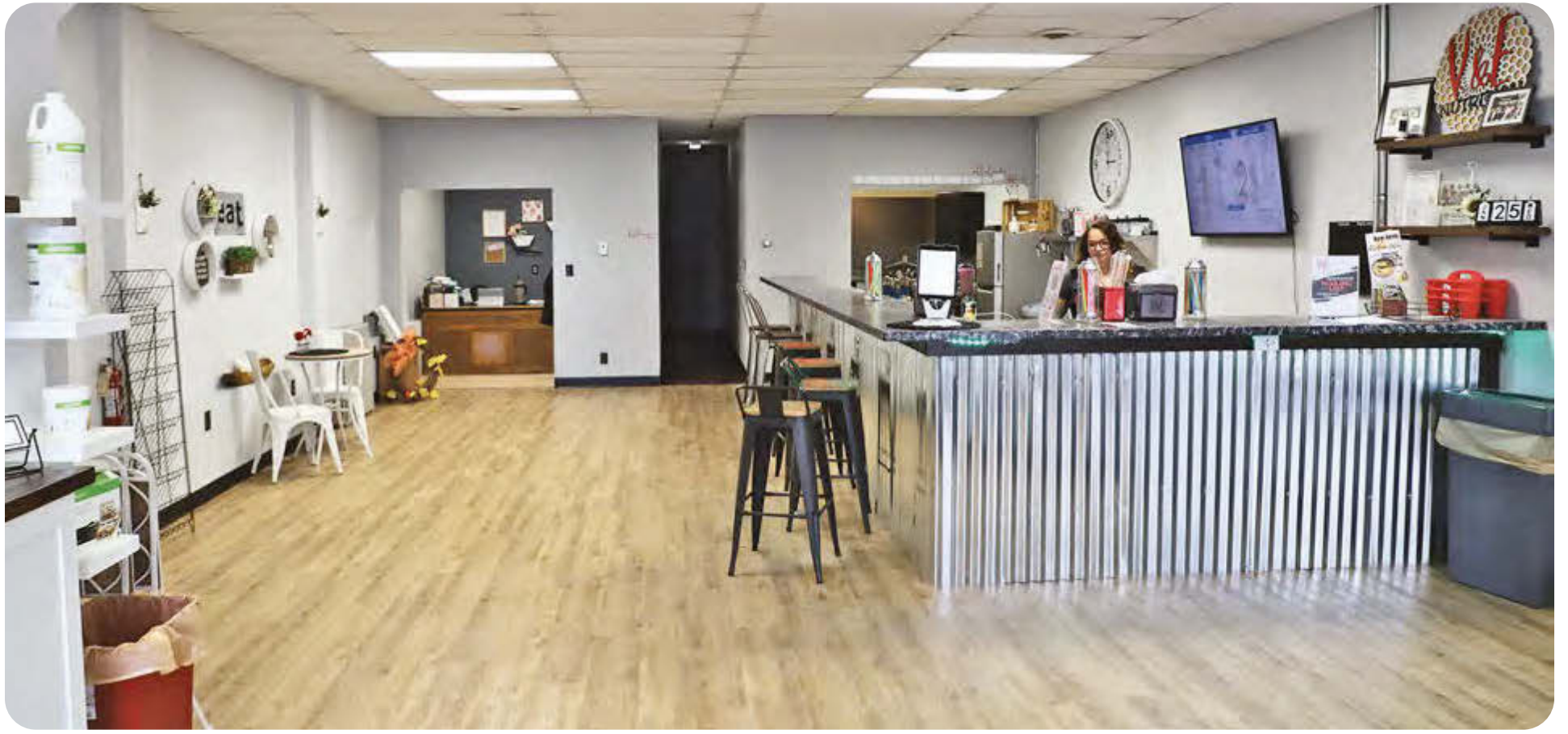
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Kolette Kapp renovated her K&E Nutrition space to make it a "happy place" for her customers to come in and enjoy the atmosphere.

Customer favorites include the Almond Joy shake, and the energy drink is Captain America. "The Captain America has blue blast and rainbow candy in it, so it's a little sweet and a little sour. It's a crowd favorite here, and in Mason City as well."

Another item that can be found at K&E Nutrition is aloe shots. "If you think of what aloe does to your skin when you have a sunburn? That's what it helps with in your digestive track. It's really, really good for your tummy, and personally, I think it helps my skin," Kapp said. "I drink it every day. I put it in my water or whatever I'm drinking, every single day."

Kapp finds most of her customers are at K&E Nutrition in the mornings and right around lunch time. "Lunch seems to be busier here in Iowa Falls than breakfast is," she said. "It's either a pick-me-up for the afternoon or a lot of people from Main Street businesses walk here for lunch and grab something."

Students really enjoy her products, as well. Kapp has a "brand ambassador" at Ellsworth Community College, "Her name is Madalyn, and she is on the softball team, and she really helps out by posting things on her Snapchat and Facebook. She's kind of the face of K&E on campus and has really helped out with the college kids, especially with the athletes. They'll have a workout or a practice and come in and grab something."

Kapp has daughters who come in during their breaks to help out, as well. "Kylee will be here all summer," she said. Her other daughters are Jaliyah and Mykayla. Her two sons, Jakyb and Karter, do not have any interest in helping at K&E. "They like to help their dad," she said of her husband, Keith Janssen. "Usually it's just a one-woman show (at K&E), but my daughters do help out if they don't have school."

The cold winter months make for a slower business because "people don't want to get out of their car," she said, noting they'd prefer a drive-through or cooking in the warmth of their home. "Summer is my busiest time."



PHOTOS BY ELAINE LORING / TIMES CITIZEN

A line of ingredients are ready for customers who want to special-order their drinks and shakes, or simply choose off the menu.

However, that doesn't keep Kapp from enticing customers to come in from the cold. Currently she is hosting a weight-loss challenge with Sarah Morton Fitness out of Hampton and helps with meal planning and live virtual lessons. "It's like a Biggest Loser competition." Kapp and Sarah Morton will host an occasional fitness class like Pound, where participants use drum sticks and pound them on the floor, over their head, or side to side to newer music, similar to a HIIT workout. "I've also done a yoga class, but I also do things like a wreath-making class and pumpkin painting."

Kapp would like to see more classes and things to get more people and kids involved. Especially since she has a background in education. "Coming from education... I was a preschool teacher and education administrator... so, I'd like to really like to find more classes and have those littles in the store."

On the downside, one of the things Kapp has seen in the price hikes, which have been occurring in all areas. "We have seen a slowdown... because of prices. You go to the grocery store and it's so dramatically different than it used to be. That goes for our cups, and our ingredients. We've had a price increase in what our products cost. Prices, since I've started, have almost doubled. It has really changed shipping and production times, too. Everything is in back-ordered and that's a newer thing. We just do our best and I try to keep prices as low as possible."

Kapp says owning K&E is her dream job and "this is me... the decorations... the fun energy drink names..." Although not all the drink names are hers, as she works with an outside team, she thinks she's the creative one when it comes to holiday drink names. "I've made up my fair share of the recipes."

When customers come into K&E Nutrition, Kapp enjoys getting to know them and even learns their drinks. "I love people and I love building relationships," she said. "I still have customers from Mason City I check in with all the time. I've made so many quality friendships, and here, too. You just start getting to know your customers and building relationships and friendships. I really fell in love with it."

K&E Nutrition's winter hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. She also has a Facebook page.

"I really, really love this environment" she added. "It's a happy place with a whole different atmosphere. People come in and they're happy. I like to smile, and I like to have fun. This is just fun." ■

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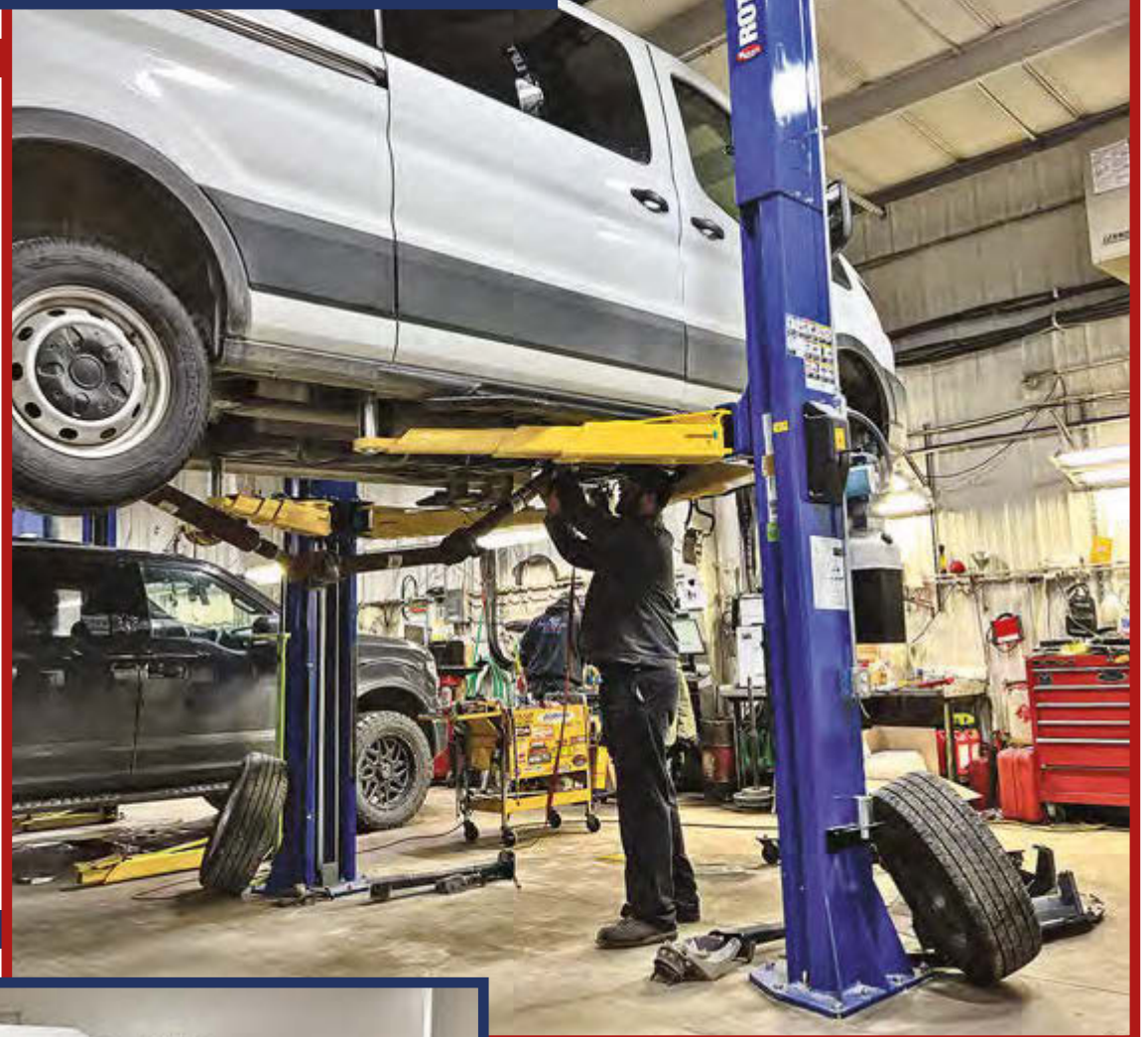
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We recently held Waverly Connect at our Waverly location. This is a networking event put on by the Waverly Chamber of Commerce every quarter. We were lucky enough to be the host for this quarter's event. We were able to connect with the Mayor, Chamber Executive Director, and other members of the Chamber in early February! We look forward to creating more connections and opportunities in the Waverly community!

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Rhonda Diemer's business, Criss Cross Stitchery at 508 Washington Ave., has become a destination for the cross-stitching community.

Criss-crossing the country

Criss Cross Stitchery a road trip travel destination

BY ELAINE LORING | eloring@iafalls.com

A small shop on Oak Street across from McDonald's was her first choice when Rhonda Diemer decided to open Criss Cross Stitchery back in December of 2020. However, word of

mouth quickly traveled throughout the stitching community, and soon Diemer began to outgrow her space. She needed something a lot larger.

"We weren't there quite a year," Diemer said of the Oak Street address. "We outgrew it so fast... the demand was greater than I could have imagined. We did four times the business than we estimated in our first year, and this year we doubled our business again."

The current location at 508

Washington Ave. was purchased in August of 2021 and Rhonda and her husband Steven got to work with renovations.

"We're fast filling up this too, so thankfully we have all of this to expand into," Diemer said, motioning to a room at the back of the showroom. "We do classes, and we have open stitch on Saturday mornings from 10 to 1, and we do the same thing on Wednesdays from 10 to 4. People who just want to come and sit and stitch with friends can sit

and stitch. There's usually three or four people in here."

Not only has Criss Cross Stitchery become a meeting place for locals, it has become something bigger. "We're a destination, that's the cool thing," she began. "There's a Facebook group called Stitching Road Trip, and you can look up shops everywhere in the whole United States and people – ladies – will literally plan their trips going from shop to shop. A third of our business is from that."



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Diemer has been cross-stitching for 40-plus years, learning the skill from Eldora's Shirley Shirley, and has kept improving over the years. At the same time, she was competing in the equestrian field, and discovered she had a bone cancer, which was caused by her blood. "Now too many bones will just snap, so I can't ride horses anymore," she said. "I had a stem cell transplant four years ago and have been cancer-free ever since. My bones are regenerating due to a new product they developed out there, so my bones are getting stronger, but I still won't go back to riding."

After giving up horseback riding, Diemer was bored being home and "my husband was getting chubby because all I wanted to do was cook and bake," she laughed. And that's when she decided to open Criss Cross Stitchery.

Now, with her growing business, Diemer has had to hire an employee, Sandy Heiden. "She was a schoolteacher in Alden for 30+ years. She came into the little shop and was in a lot to sit and stitch," Diemer said, adding that this led to her part-time job offer. "Her people skills are amazing, and she knows what the product is. She's a really good fit."

Criss Cross Stitchery carries three floss lines and is looking to add a fourth. "You can't have too many colors to pick from," she smiled. "We girls like our choices." She also has over 100 kinds of fabric and over 2,000 patterns in her inventory. Later this month Diemer will be hosting an In-Shop Stitch-Along, where a group of women sign up, pick a pattern, buy a kit (which includes a surprise gift), and they meet the third Saturday of the month. "We try to have a goal to accomplish so many stitches by the next month." Stitches are counted by the project.

Another thing that Diemer loves is when people come in with their completed pieces to do a "show and share." She motioned to a piece of cross-stitched work hanging in her shop made by a retired Wellsburg teacher. "I remember when she bought the pattern and picked out her threads and fabric," Diemer said. "I said, 'can I hang it up?' Until she comes back in, it will be here."

Diemer also has several of her own completed pieces hanging on the store's walls, including "a pile of about eight things in the back room not ready for display yet," she admitted.

Some women come in and make "sampler" pieces, while others come in and want to make something for each season. Diemer helps them all. "We have regulars and we have a group that comes up from Des Moines every two to three months. We have people from Ankeny who have met each other here, not knowing each other, and they come up together now."

The big thing she is working on is Christmas in July where a Christmas tree will be filled with cross stitched ornaments, and Diemer will have a sale on anything Christmas that could be stitched



Rhonda Diemer, and her pup Ottis, welcome customers to her shop, catering to both locals and out-of-town groups.

in July. "If you get it in July, finish in July and bring it in to show before the end of that month, we'll do an incentive like a coupon for 25 percent off your next full project."

Diemer says there are only four nice-sized stitching shops in Iowa, including Criss Cross Stitchery, and two others, which are smaller. "Iowa Falls has one of the best quilt stores in Iowa, too. It's a destination."

She's also looking at expanding her merchandise into the back room because at least 10 to 20 new patterns are released every week. In the meantime, Diemer continues to host groups,



This tree will be filled with cross-stitched ornaments for the Christmas in July event.

grow her inventory, and help people with their projects. Every pattern has a suggestion of what cloth to sew on, and if a customer wants something different, Diemer will help customize thread colors or types of cloth.

The Diemers own the building at their Washington Avenue location, including two vacant apartments upstairs, "which haven't seen the light of day to be remodeled in over 50 years," she laughed, adding that maybe someday they will tackle that job and have a bed and breakfast. "Iowa Falls is a destination for a lot of people that are coming to see their kids in college and don't want to stay in a hotel. I think if we did anything, we'd do that."

Every part of Diemer's business has also been thought out, including her business cards, which are 3-inch by 3-inch. Customers can use them as a ruler on their borders, and it has a 2-inch option on the card, as well. "I've heard from stores on the west coast who asked if they mind if I copy their idea. I said sure! We send these cards with everyone."

The growth at Criss Cross Stitchery has surprised Diemer, and surpassed her expectations. "My husband thought it would be a 'bump and run' or short-lived thing because we're retirement age now," she began. "But at some point, I'd like to get a co-owner, because when the time comes, and because we are really growing and getting established, it will be an easy fit for someone." ■

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Dave Rubow stands in the dining room of the Eldora Social Club and Carnegie's Lounge. The place is more than drinks and food, however.

Being sociable

New venue opens in Eldora

BY COREY MEINTS | cmeints@iafalls.com

Dave Rubow made a gutsy move two years ago this month. He purchased the old Carnegie Library in Eldora. Perhaps that wasn't the gutsiest part of it. Opening a pizza lounge in this day and age was probably more risky.

The building, at the southeast corner of the courthouse square, is more than a place for a few cocktails or glasses of wine. It's even more than an artisan pizzeria. Rubow set the place up to be a sort of artist's retreat to share and display their works.

All of that lends to the name The Eldora Social Club and Carnegie's Lounge.

"Our vision was to offer an opportunity for the customers to gather in a social setting and enjoy food and drink together and be able to view and appreciate the artistic talents of their fellow community members," Rubow said. "We tailored our menu to enhance the other menu offerings in the community and not duplicate them. The word 'Club' in the name does not mean that membership is required to come in, all operations are open to the public. We are excited to help create traffic on the south side of the courthouse square again in Eldora."

Rubow purchased the building in February of 2021. The lounge portion opened in mid-November of 2022 and the restaurant opened in mid-December of 2022.

"We started working on the building right away," Rubow said. "The first task

was mitigating damage in the basement of the building caused by groundwater seeping into the basement. We started by re-grading the grounds to ensure that groundwater was properly flowing away from the building. We then spent a great deal of time tearing out sheetrock and plaster in the basement walls that had been damaged and replacing it with new material."

Just more than two years removed from the state's restaurants closing due to COVID, Rubow said it was a little nerve-racking preparing to open one. But in the wake of the closures, and after restaurants and bars were again open, another concern arose. It was the same issue many businesses dealt with and many still are.

"The supply chain issues did extended our timeline for the restoration and development of the

building," Rubow said. "Anything stainless steel related or refrigeration related were in very short supply during COVID - all things which are vital to a restaurant and lounge operation. We also ran into various small items which were unavailable at the time which disrupted the normal orderly progression which a restoration and construction project needs to follow."

With the building being on the National Registry of Historic Places, Rubow said the process was going to take some extra time anyway. The Eldora Carnegie Library was built in 1902 through a gift from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. Carnegie was a United States steel industry magnate in the late 1800s and after selling his company in 1901, he undertook a philanthropic effort to fund the building of almost 3,000 libraries across the United States, including the Eldora Public Library. The Eldora Library served as the arts and cultural center and community gathering spot for the Eldora community from 1902 until 1999 when the new library building was built. Rubow said he is excited to return the building to its former calling.

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Dave Rubow stands on the historic steps of the former Eldora Library. It is now the Eldora Social Club and Carnegie's Lounge.

"The restoration also was lengthened because we took a very cautious and careful approach to the restoration because of the architectural significance of the building," Rubow said. "We wanted to honor the history of the building and enhance its features and not make a lot of major changes to its appearance. I was attracted to this building by a desire to restore and preserve the building for future generations to enjoy. We won't likely see buildings of this architectural significance built in small towns again, so it is important to preserve the ones we have."

Rubow said the timeline also changed some because of issues at his other business, Fidelity Abstract and Title Co. in Eldora. He actually acquired another local abstract business in the middle of starting the restoration project.

"This acquisition required that I spend more of my time integrating that business into my current operation, so I knew I would not be able to spend as much time as I had planned overseeing the restaurant project," Rubow said. "When this occurred, I solicited the help of my oldest son, Dillon. I asked him if he was willing to come home for a period of time and help oversee the restaurant project."



Dave Rubow said transforming the former library into a bar, restaurant and artist's getaway took some extra time as it is on the National Registry of Historic Places.

As it turned out, his son was a perfect proxy. "Dillon had gained significant experience in restaurant front of the house operations during his college career as an assistant manager at Baroncini Ristorante in Iowa City and right after his graduation from Iowa, at The Latin King Restaurant in Des Moines," Rubow said. "At the time, Dillon was preparing to make a move to advance his career online with his college major studies, but he put that on hold to come home and help oversee the final construction of the project and the installation of equipment. He also undertook the training of staff and the opening of the restaurant and will continue to help with the operation for a few more months to ensure its smooth operation before advancing on to the next level in his career path. He really knocked it out of the park for me. I couldn't have pulled off the project without him."

Through all the worries and delays, Rubow said his vision never changed.

"I decided to be patient and wait until we could complete the project according to our original plans," Rubow said.

The lounge will serve a full complement of beer, wine, cocktails and specialty drinks. The kitchen will offer a unique menu of artisan pizzas, traditional pizzas, homemade soups, hot and cold Italian themed sandwiches, appetizers and baked pasta specials. The menu was designed to protect the delicate nature of the art pieces in the building so that little or no oil or

grease would be produced from the kitchen. Rubow says the signature menu offering will be the handmade artisan pizzas which will be cooked in a decades old pizza oven which has served the Eldora community by the past owners of Diamonds Pizza, Pete's Pizza, Jerry's Pizza and Eldora Pizza. He purchased the pizza oven and equipment from the new owner of the former Eldora Pizza and Steakhouse building when he found that the equipment would not be utilized in the new restaurant opening in that building."

The Eldora Social Club and Carnegie's Lounge is open Wednesday through Saturday evenings with the kitchen open from 4:30 to 9 p.m. and the lounge open until it closes.

Longtime friend Chef John Benson will be overseeing the kitchen operation. He has also hired seven other employees.

"John and I have always hoped to work together on a restaurant project when the right opportunity arose," Rubow said. "He worked for many years as an opener for a national restaurant chain and has managed restaurants in Ames and Des Moines and brings many years of experience and expertise to the project."

Rubow added that he also has two "Artists in Residence" with Tom Christopher and Daniel Adams, both award-winning artist from Eldora.

"The majority of the venue will be reserved for local area artists, but Tom and Dan will also help source state and regional artists who may have an interest in presenting a traveling exhibit at the venue," Rubow said.

Rubow said the few short months he has been open have been everything he hoped. Almost.

"It's still pretty early, so we are just trying to fine tune our offerings and listening to our customers comments and learning from them," Rubow said. "Business has been great. We have had to deal with several winter storms and blizzards, which has made it difficult for customers to get in on occasion, but it is winter in Iowa so I guess it's par for the course." ■

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ACKLEY WORLD JOURNAL FILE PHOTOS

Brothers Korey (left) and Kollin joined forces in the creation of the area's largest wedding and event center. Located just outside of Steamboat Rock, construction was completed in 2020 with eight weddings hosted. Last year over 40 were held.

Timbers Edge venture

BECKY SCHIPPER | news@iafalls.com

What began as a joke between brothers Korey and Kollin DeBerg evolved into a venture to provide a wedding and event center in an area where those events were typically held at golf courses and church halls. The niche would be filled through the planning of the pair and eventually with the opening of Timbers Edge Wedding and Event Center, constructed in the middle of a cornfield, north of Steamboat Rock.

The structure, created with a modern rustic feel, looks like a barn from the outside. Inside, it includes a dining room/ballroom, balcony with bride and groom suites, a catering kitchen, and bar, with nearly 8,000 square feet of space available. It had taken nearly two years for the brothers to bring their idea from conception to the completion of the construction process.

Korey admits to having doubts about the project. Kollin, on the other hand, was consistently sure of its success.

The first year, even with the opening falling slightly beyond the most popular month for weddings, proved to be a good one, filled with the opportunity to find proper staff, work out kinks that come with any new business, and position it in the eyes of their customers.

As the process of opening began, so did the challenges of what would become the pandemic.

"We were fortunate to have begun construction in advance of the pandemic," began Korey. "While towards the opening we had more difficulty in getting supplies – our first wedding was held here before we could get some doors and trim though we were fortunate that major construction supplies were not affected."

Kollin says that it was more challenging to promote such a large venue during a time when the public was being told the exact opposite – to not hold large events – super-spreaders, as dubbed by national media.

It wasn't easy. "We held eight weddings our first year – many were canceled while our bills from construction costs, were still coming in," Kollin said.

The brothers had completed their due diligence. They'd researched long and deep before diving into the project, to make certain that their 'sure bet' didn't cause the rug to be pulled out from under them. Still, calculating how to pay those large bills was a harrowing experience.

"The monthly payment on the building was large enough to be a challenge, let alone the interior equipment and everyday supplies," Korey admitted. "So we got creative."

That creativity included hosting restaurant nights featuring various local food establishments like Heikens Family Foods (formerly Family Traditions Meat Company), Peppercorn Pantry, and others to serve an abbreviated menu on site, benefiting both the restaurant and the facility.

"Looking back we were forced to figure out how to make revenue as the big gatherings we had planned to focus on, didn't happen," Korey remarked. "We became an accommodating venue in the process, as well."



In 2020, Timbers Edge Wedding and Event Center played host to the AGWSR Prom. While the glass doors at the back of the photo had to be kept closed during the early spring event, during warmer months, they open to a patio which surrounds two sides of the event center.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

It's not only the size of the venue, but the views, as reflected in the windows behind this bride and groom, that make it a quiet and beautiful venue for weddings. While the pandemic slowed large events, it had a lesser effect than expected on the number of events held there.

The brothers liken that accommodation to check-in and check-out times at hotels.

"If you allow patrons early access to decorate, for instance, or provide extra time for tear down, it's appreciated and remembered. Brides tell their friends," Kollin explained.

In February they'll host a Valentine's Dinner which will include a catered meal of smoked brisket or cranberry glazed pork loin, specialty sides and desserts, along with entertainment of light music.

A presentation of Dueling Pianos is planned for later this spring.

The brothers have also added corporate events to their business model. For instance, the Iowa Utilities Board hosted a public meeting on proposed carbon pipelines there. Other events such as Christmas parties, class reunions, birthdays, and graduations are on the calendar as well. Still, 95 percent of their income is derived from weddings.

For the majority of time, the schedule is reserved for upscale events, like the weddings it was envisioned for. In 2022 for example, the facility was host to 43 weddings. The DeBergs note that they have seen some deterrent in that lodging for couples and their guests isn't always close. The pair count on the bridal parties utilize links on their website to lodging in Cedar Falls and Iowa Falls. Utilizing Highway 20, both are within 15 to 20 minutes from Timbers Edge.

"Our best lodging experiences for our patrons have come from local individuals who are hopping on the Airbnb rental train in the local area," explains Korey. "It's a good thing for them, and us!"

Inflation has caused its own issues for the brothers, food costs for the venue are on the rise as it is for everyone. Korey explains that when a couple hope to feed 300 guests a \$30 plate, it can be a surprise that the plate is not prime rib.

"That's \$9,000 that isn't being spent on their dress, their honeymoon, or lodging for guests," Korey said. "That can be a shock for everyone involved in the wedding."

While the pandemic and inflation are affecting the venue, the brothers say that their experience and their dedication are keeping the venue on track. They do admit that the immediate financial success they'd hoped for is slower than they expected. Still, it continues on an upward trend with limited openings for the summer of 2023.

"In the end, we've fill a niche that was needed in this area and we feel that when all is said and done it will be a successful venture, we just need to be patient, fulfill our clients wishes for the perfect wedding venue, and provide the best service we possibly can to them," Korey states. ■



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