

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/money/2015/11/04/store-helps-owner-look-future/75151024/>

Store helps owner look to the future

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt / 12:40 p.m. CST November 4, 2015



(Photo: Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt)

Nancy Paul's journey into entrepreneurship is one that she never expected to take alone. It was to be a family business with her husband, the Rev. Dr. Jerry Paul, and son, Joshua.

Although they were living in O'Fallon, Ill., the couple had roots in Wisconsin and wanted to return to Sheboygan where Nancy was born and raised. However, after spending months and months researching franchises and deciding on a "Wild Birds Unlimited" business, the franchise recommended a location in Green Bay.

The father and son did the initial legwork in writing a business plan and fulfilling franchise requirements. They selected potential sites in Green Bay, and along with Paul Pickett, the vice president of franchise development, decided on a site on Oneida Street in Green Bay in the Pier One Center.

"Joshua had an MBA and was close to earning a master's degree in marketing, so he did the research and looked at all of the demographics such as the percentage of homes with bird feeders," Nancy commented. "He was tired of the corporate world and always wanted to move to Wisconsin. Jerry was a creator and a visionary, but in his career he was always an administrator and didn't like to get in the trenches."

The combination of skills made a perfect team, and in February, they received training and planned to open the store in June or July.

Nancy said, "After training, we had regular weekly coaching sessions with the franchise to prepare for opening. They had everything laid out. You have to do the legwork, but

they give you a time frame for contacting vendors, making credit card applications, and marketing.”

They were ready to go when Jerry was diagnosed with cancer. Then, on May 14, when Joshua and his son, Alexander, were staying with Nancy and Jerry, Joshua died in his sleep at 41 years of age. Jerry passed away the next week on May 20 at the age of 65.

In the midst of her grief, Nancy, who is her grandson’s guardian, said that her other children, a son and daughter, encouraged her to move forward. Her grandson agreed.

“Nana, don’t not do this because of me,” Alex said. “I have friends I can stay with when you are working on the store.”

With great support from her family, friends and the franchise, Nancy decided to proceed. Her brother, Larry Kalk, a nature and landscape photographer, agreed to be the store manager. Kalk attended the franchise training in July and the annual conference shortly after. Overall, they were overwhelmed by the support they received from other franchisees who were willing to share their ideas and successes.

“There was not a single person in the group of folks who had anything but positive things to say,” Nancy related. “There was so much camaraderie.”

There was also the common love of birds and nature; something that Nancy, who is a licensed social worker, has always found calming and relaxing. She hopes to share that love with customers at the store which opened Monday.

“I realize that my learning curve is going to be 100-feet high here,” she said. “There’s just so much stuff to learn, and I’m focusing on it day to day to make it manageable.”

She also relies on the support of the community and has found everyone to be very welcoming. One of her first steps was to join the Ashwaubenon Business Association, where she met other business owners. Representatives from the Wildlife Sanctuary and Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve have been invited to the store’s grand opening the week of Nov. 15.

Nancy says that the business has given her something to focus on after suffering such great loss.

She commented, “I can feel excited about my life, and look forward.”

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and past district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.