

A Legacy

for the Birds

by Elizabeth Denham

As is the case with many corporate employees, Gary Fortcher was not ready to ease into retirement when he left his job in the accounting and finance field. What he discovered was a franchise that was not only for the birds, it was also for his legacy.



Fourteen years ago, Fortcher and his wife, Kathleen Mulligan bought a Wild Birds Unlimited franchise in Oakdale on Long Island, New York. On January 1, 2021, Brooke Cassidy bought the location from her father and stepmother.

“We had an independent birding

store in our area, so I knew the kind of people a business like this would attract, and it has been a true joy to be a part of Wild Birds,” Fortcher said. “It is a business that is great with people, great with environment and has the backing of a strong and engaged franchise systems behind us. Passing it to

Brooke meant a lot to me, and I know this is a lifelong business that she can make into a career.”

In the early years, Fortcher did the heavy lifting while Mulligan worked behind the scenes most of the time and in the store when she was needed. When Cassidy’s children

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were small, her job in the restaurant industry was being phased out and she came in a couple of days a week to help her dad.

“As my kids got older, I became more and more involved,” Cassidy said. “Having the flexibility of working with my dad was so important for me, especially as my children were growing up and then going through a divorce, it was a great opportunity for me.”

Six or seven years ago, the family formulated a plan for Cassidy to

buy the business when the time was right. Cassidy worked for two years managing the business, and when Fortcher had a knee replacement last year and took some time off, they all realized the time was right for her to take over.

Now, Cassidy’s 17-year-old daughter works in the store and is learning the value of business ownership from her mom.

“She is learning skills that will help her in whatever job she chooses,” Cassidy said. “And my son can’t



wait to come to work now that he’s getting old enough.”

Fortcher and Mulligan are grateful for the opportunity a franchise has brought to their family.

“People ask me why I would choose the franchise model and pay franchising fees,” Fortcher said. “When you have a system like Wild Birds behind you who has strength and immense wealth of knowledge and experience that we can tap into, the fee is well worth it.”

“We both got COVID early on in the pandemic,” Mulligan said. “Paul Pickett (of Wild Birds) was the first one to call us to make sure we were okay. And that is a reflection of the whole team. They are there, they engage and they listen to the franchisees.”

Mulligan is also happy to be able to leave the business in Cassidy’s capable hands.

“When you sell a business to a third party, you hope it will continue, but once you sell it you are done,” she said. “Selling it to



Brooke, we can see her success, how much the customers love her, and we are able to see our legacy continue in the hands of someone we know will sustain it.”

Fortcher agreed.

“We had no idea that COVID would be a boon to our business,” he said. “So we had tightened our belts and made decisions that would keep us going. It turned out that when people had time to slow

down, they spent that time enjoying the birds and keeping their feeders full. Even so, when you pass a business to a child, you want to have the confidence that it will support her family and help her pay her mortgage. With Wild Birds and the success we have had, we know that will happen.”

Cassidy is excited about the future, and she is happy her dad is still willing to fill in and work part-time for her here and there.

“I have been in a training recently, and he has come in to help me out when I needed him. The tables have turned,” she said. “And I am excited to look to the future. I have a goal of opening another location and would even love to bring my son into it.”

To learn more about Wild Birds Unlimited, please visit: <https://www.wbu.com/>

