Lake Country Convenience & Bait

After leaving a 26 year marketing and manufacturing career at Datacard in Minnetonka, Craig Finnesgard has found a new career as the owner and manager of Lake Country Convenience & Bait in Shieldsville Township, just northwest of Faribault.

For campers, hunters, and fishing and water enthusiasts, Lake Country Convenience & Bait is more than a spot to fill their gas tank or bait bucket. Their customers can also purchase food and lottery tickets, rent a DVD, buy an Adirondack chair handcrafted by a local resident, or linger over coffee.

He and his wife, Carrie, a medical transcriptionist, looked at several other businesses before pursuing the 9-year-old convenience store. Despite the fact that the location was great, nestled in the middle of lake country with the nearest competition nine miles away, the Finnesgards were having a difficult time developing a personal and business model that would work. “In addition there were numerous roadblocks along the way, and frankly, the business didn’t look workable,” Finnesgard said.

Over the course of a year, Ken Henrickson, director of the Owatonna Business Incubator and professional business consultant for the SBDC, helped prepare spreadsheets with the business’ year-to-year tax information and packaged a SBA and conventional financing loan proposal for the bank. After more than 20 meetings with Ken, lawyers, accountants, and bankers, the husband and wife team created a business plan that appeared viable.

“I know that we would not have been able to pull this together without Ken’s help,” Finnesgard said.

Finnesgard’s background prepared him to become a business owner and manager. In his youth he stocked shelves in his father’s Faribault pharmacy and worked at a local gas station. He then spent many years at Datacard working in nearly every area of the company: customer service, manufacturing, marketing, sales and corporate quality.

After being closed for nearly six months, Lake Country Convenience & Bait opened its doors in April of 2009 and currently employs 11 people including Craig, Carrie and their two daughters.

The business is open seven days a week at 5 a.m. and closes at 8 p.m., or 6 p.m. on Sundays. “Sometimes I wonder where our regulars went for the six months the business was closed. In my mind’s eye I see them sitting on the curb, passing a coffee thermos back and forth, solving the world’s problems as they waited for the store to reopen.”

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