

Waterford's best friend

Soon-to-open upscale men's shop has a furry namesake

ALEX RODRIGUEZ
alex.rodriguez@journaltimes.com

WATERFORD — Vana and Ward Lyon love boxers. When a friend from Woof Gang Rescue in Racine informed them that they had a new boxer in the foster system come in, they were hesitant to own another one.

They already had the very sassy Dixie Rose. They adopted the second boxer anyway.

When they took Rusty into their home in February 2021, they never

expected that the loveable pup would become the face of their next venture, Rusty's Dry Goods.

Rusty's Dry Goods is an upscale men's gift shop set to open Saturday, July 23, in Waterford, 307 E. Main St. The location is a former dental office located conveniently across the street from the Lyons' other store, Main Street Mercantile, a similar style store to Rusty's that features more female-oriented gifts.

The Lyons opened Main Street Mercantile in September 2020. Vana has 15 years of corporate experience, having worked for Harley-Davidson, Kohler and Kohl's on the corporate level. After the death of her father in 2019 put

things into perspective for her, Vana grew tired of corporate life. That's when the Lyons decided to go into business for themselves.

"Life is too short," Vana said. "I really don't want to be waking up and following someone else's dreams and putting more money in their wallet and not being happy with myself and what I was doing."

Vana wrote her business plan in two weeks and everything started coming together for Main Street Mercantile after finding the location, not to mention the business partners to help fund the endeavor. Vana says the reception to Mercantile has been overwhelming, with repeat customers coming in every week.

While the aim of Rusty's is to cater to a male demographic, Vana considers all the different products sold at the store to be gender neutral. Even though the store is a "Men's Store," the Lyons aim to have something for everyone. Vana herself prefers more masculine scents when it comes to candles anyway.

Rusty's was created to scratch the shopping itch the men of Waterford, and beyond, have and don't often scratch. While Mercantile would sell lavender scented bath products and other items of the sort, you can find scents like beer and cigarettes at Rusty's.



ALEX RODRIGUEZ, ALEX.RODRIGUEZ@JOURNALTIMES.COM

Rusty serves as the namesake and mascot of Rusty's Dry Goods. He is a 5½-year-old purebred boxer rescue from Georgia.

Please see RUSTY'S, Page B2

EXPERIENCE-BASED LICENSES

Program serves as perfect fit

For those who find teaching as second career

RYAN PATTERSON
ryan.patterson@journaltimes.com

RACINE — Keith Cruise, Valerie Freeman and Megan King all became teachers by applying for experience-based licenses through the State of Wisconsin.

To earn an experience-based license, instructors-to-be must pass four courses in three years while they are also teaching.

It's a much faster path to becoming a teacher than getting a traditional education degree from a four-year university.

Alex DeBaker, Racine Academies executive director, estimated that 75-80% of the RUSD career and technical education instructors have EBLs. As such, the majority of those teachers previously worked in the fields they now teach.

DeBaker said it is important for students to learn from instructors with hands-on experience, some of whom can teach courses that would not otherwise be taught.

"It's the way education is moving, is career-focused ... (and) engaging students in what they're passionate about," DeBaker said. "They come with a ton of skill sets that they've learned over the course of their careers in the field."

That's at the core of what RUSD's Academies of Racine are all about.

"Academies are small learning communities that provide real-world experiences with local businesses and professionals, linking schoolwork and the workplace," RUSD's official description states. "Regular coursework, including math, language arts, science and history, is presented within the context of the academy's focus."

For Freeman — who has degrees in computer and electrical engineering, and previously worked as an engineer on an Air Force base in Tennessee — it was exciting yet challenging to teach new courses.

"It was all me figuring it out on my own, and I think that was the most difficult part, and sometimes it still is difficult," said Freeman, who is now a manufacturing and robotics teacher at Park High School. "You have no one to bounce it off of to say, 'Hey, what did you guys do? How did that work?' It's all on me."



JOURNAL TIMES FILE PHOTOS AND SUBMITTED

Clockwise from top left, Lori Nasci, Keith Cruise, Valerie Freeman and Megan King all came into teaching after years of doing something else.

'Never did I think I would be a teacher'

An engineer on an Air Force base. A cop. A financial advisor. Now, they're all teachers in Racine

RYAN PATTERSON
ryan.patterson@journaltimes.com

RACINE — Lori Nasci was tired of arresting children. So she became a teacher.

As a deputy sheriff in New Mexico, Nasci often handcuffed juveniles. After a few years away from law enforcement to raise her children, she decided to work with kids, hoping to keep them away from ever being handcuffed.

Nasci went back to college, earned an education degree and has worked in schools since 2006, including the last two years as principal at Roosevelt Elementary in Racine.

"When you start to get to know (students), how could you do any other job?" Nasci said. "I could tell that this was what I needed to do."

It's not uncommon for teachers to be in their second or third career. Here, The Journal Times features four different teachers who, like Nasci, came into teaching after years of doing something else.

At first, she laughed

Valerie Freeman initially laughed at the idea of being a teacher.

The mother of a student she was tutoring suggested Freeman teach, but she thought otherwise.

"I thought it was the funniest thing ever," Freeman said.

But as time went on, more people mentioned it. Freeman, who was trained as an engineer, eventually filled out an application to be a substitute math instructor at middle schools and high schools.

She did that for a few years

before starting full-time at Park High School in fall 2017, where she is a manufacturing and robotics pathway teacher; she also coaches Park softball and girls basketball.

Freeman grew up in Pontiac, Michigan, and always liked numbers. She didn't think about a career in education.

"I was introduced to engineering and wanted to know what it was about and what it was like, and I fell in love," Freeman said. "Never did I think I would be a teacher. It was never, ever a consideration. I thought that I didn't have the patience for it."

Freeman graduated with an electrical and computer engineering degree and then worked as an engineer for two years at an Air Force base in Tennessee. She and her husband moved to Racine in 2010. A new home, plus difficulty finding an engineering job during the Great Recession, led to her being in education.

It was challenging to learn classroom management, but Freeman said she quickly developed empathy for students.

Freeman said the toughest aspect of the job is preparation. "Teaching the students and making relationships and building bonds, that's the easy part," Freeman said. "The harder part is planning and making sure that you are equipped for the job."

Megan King agreed.

"I feel like I'm in my element when I'm with my kids in the classroom," King said. "My stress is usually around, 'Am I giving them what they need? Is the content relevant?'"

King previously worked as a family counselor and in human resources.

She went into teaching after seeing a job opening. King started teaching in February 2021 and is now a Horlick High School business pathway teacher; she also coaches track and field.

King is also a life coach, which often involves her telling clients about the importance of courage. She needed to follow her own advice and apply for the teaching position.

"I felt like it was something that fit," King said. "I don't think that I ever wanted to be a teacher, I just wanted to work with people. Then, the older I get, the more aligned we are with what our purpose is, and I think that that's kids."

Adjustments

Keith Cruise also said his biggest adjustment was lesson planning. He seems to have adapted well to teaching but is always searching for areas to improve.

"I'm still not comfortable," Cruise admitted. "When kids aren't doing as well as I think they could do, or they're struggling, I look at: 'Am I not (teaching) them in the right way?'"

Cruise, also a Horlick High School business pathway teacher, was a substitute teacher before going full-time in February 2021. He also coaches wrestling and football. Cruise had several previous jobs, including financial advisor, bank vice president and firefighter.

Cruise moved to Racine in 1993. He made a career change because he wanted to help students, and teaching was more realistic in 2021 because his children were adults.

"I've got a lot of life experience, and I was like, 'OK, my kids are all out of the house, money's not such a big deal,'" Cruise said. "I want to make a difference in the lives of some of the kids, be a positive influence."

Nasci does as well. She has been with Racine Unified for nearly a decade in several roles but always wanted to work at the elementary level so she could reach young students "before they're completely in trouble."

"Especially in elementary, they are just a bundle of joy, even the naughty ones," Nasci continued. "Actually, I kind of like the naughty ones the best, because they remind me of me."

Rewards

Cruise said teaching "gives a sense of purpose." He said it's rewarding to gain a student's trust and have conversations about life decisions.

"It's really nice," Freeman added, "to watch students grow and become young, successful adults, and to know that maybe you had a hand in that."

Freeman appreciates being a black teacher in a school that had 73% students of color in 2020-21, but she wishes there were more educators who looked like her.

"It's nice to be an African American female teacher teaching engineering, but it's not nice to be the only one in the building," Freeman said. "I hope that we will hire more, but then I also hope that the next generation of students will go into education, because it's definitely necessary, and it's important."

Please see CHANGES, Page B2

