

# Some shooting for business dreams despite economy

By STACY VOGEL

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## Photo



Photo by [Dan Lassiter](#)

Carla Herbst restocks a rack of chips at Books & Brew of Milton, a shop that she will take over in April.

## Photo



Photo by [Bill Olmsted](#)

Despite the slumping economy, new businesses are opening in the area. Mike and Karen Lou plan to open a sports bar and grill in the former Twisters building in Milton.

Amber Dean has wanted to open her own business ever since her dad opened his six years ago.

And she's not about to let an economic recession stand in the way of her dream.

The 21-year-old opened Villa Decoris hair and nail salon this week at 1129B Center Ave., Janesville, next to her father's coffee shop.

“I’m super excited,” said Dean, who described her shop as “a classy, warm, moderately priced” salon.

Though the economy has caused much belt-tightening and job cutting, some people, such as Dean, still are taking on the risk and excitement of opening small businesses.

For some, owning a business is a lifelong dream.

Others are looking for new opportunities.

That’s the case for Mike and Karen Lou. They hope to open a sports bar and grill in the former Twisters building, 403 W. High St., Milton.

The timing seems perfect, Mike said.

Karen lost her job at Lear Corp. when sport-utility vehicle production ended at the Janesville General Motors plant, and Mike is close to retirement from the U.S. Postal Service.

They’re concerned about the recession but believe people still appreciate inexpensive meals out, Mike said. He hopes to attract families after events at Milton High School down the street.

“People are staying home more, but you can’t stay in forever,” he said.

Bud Gayhart, director of Small Business Development Centers in Whitewater and Janesville, cautions people to think long and hard about opening businesses in this economy. Financiers are less willing to loan money, and customers are less willing to spend, he said.

“It is probably one of the most challenging times to consider starting a business,” he said.

Anyone opening a business, especially now, needs to have a strong background in that industry, Gayhart said. Prospective business owners must be willing to devote a lot of time and money and realize the consequences if they fail.

“I am oftentimes that cold bucket of water that gets thrown on people, but it’s the reality check,” he said. “I just want people to understand the commitment they have to have to this business.”

Dean isn’t taking on as much risk as some because she will rent a building owned by her father, she said. She’s the only employee, so overhead costs are low, though she did borrow money to buy the equipment.

Her father, Mocha Moment owner Steve Dean, is helping her learn the ropes, she said.

Carla Herbst also had a mentor to help her become a first-time business owner. She’s taking over ownership of Books & Brew, 613 W. Madison Ave., Milton, from owner Maureen Boyle at the beginning of April.

Herbst never thought about owning a business, but she fell in love with the coffee/used book shop when she started working there eight months ago, she said. When Boyle asked if she’d like to buy it, she decided to go for it.

She already has an established business and built-in customer base, but it’s still a little scary, she said.

Herbst said she knows the first few months might be slow, but she's hoping things improve in summer.

"I just have a great feeling that things will turn around," she said. "You've just got to give it a try."

### **Economy hasn't stopped customers at new businesses**

You might not know there's a recession at a couple of new local businesses, their owners say.

Gail and John Nordlof, for example, say business has been steady since the Northleaf Winery opened in Milton two weeks ago.

The Nordlofs were planning the business at 232 S. Janesville St. long before the economy crashed, Gail said. They were a little worried the recession would hurt their opening, but they've found it might work to their advantage, she said.

"People, we think, can treat themselves to something that's not very expensive," she said. "Rather than spending a lot of money on a night out, they can get a bottle of wine and have it

Business owner Kevin Riley also attributes some of his success to affordability.

He opened Riley's on the Green, a virtual indoor golf business, at 219 W. Milwaukee St., Janesville, in November. He charges \$20 for an hour of virtual golf, less than competitors in Madison and Milwaukee, he said.

Business started slow in November and December but picked up in January and February as word got out, he said. The business is generally booked on weekends and has reservations almost every weekday.

"The recession, I'm not letting it bother me," Riley said.

He did adjust his business strategy because of the economy, he said. He originally planned to be open five or six days a week, but instead he decided to be open on weekends and by appointment during the week.

He still hopes to take the business full-time eventually, he said.

"(The recession) is just a ride to play through," he said.

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