

Cornerstone Naturals- It's All in the Family

By Scott Laird

Walking into Cornerstone Naturals in Vernonia is like walking into a mix of a museum and a health food store. Dennis and Marilyn Nix have always been interested in antiques and collectibles. And that's one of the reasons they opened their shop, Etcetera, in Vernonia over five years ago. Recently they changed the name of the store to Cornerstone Naturals and have added natural health products like vitamins, essential oils, creams, and soaps, natural pet products, and bulk spices and teas to their mix of furniture, books, clothing, house wares and gift items. The change in focus is based on a higher demand for healthy products and the family's commitment to looking for healthier ways to live.

"We were forced to make serious changes," said Dennis. "Fifteen years ago I was given five years to live because of extreme hypertension and an enlarged heart. We worked at changing our diet and cooking patterns, started taking vitamins, and cut out sugar. I also slowed down and began appreciating and enjoying my family and especially my wife. And I'm still here."

Marilyn also has a life style change story in her background. Marilyn grew up in Chapman on one acre where her family grew a lot of their own food, hauling buckets from Scappoose Creek for water. Marilyn's father was diagnosed with a heart condition, followed recommended diet and other changes, and is still alive in his eighties.



"We have seven children and can't afford to be running to the doctor all the time," said Marilyn. "We had to look for alternative care options and healthier ways to live. Our kids drink tea and take vitamins. When our family gets a bug, we tend to pass things on from one to the next, but when our kids do get sick, they don't stay sick as long."

So it made sense to start selling healthy life style items in the store. "We started offering the bulk teas and spices, and people began requesting more healthy items," said Marilyn. "We saw a growing need."

Dennis and Marilyn started their own business when they started selling baby clothes on Ebay after their youngest, Bethany, outgrew them. Then they inherited Dennis' mother's estate when she passed away and brought her things up from California. "We didn't have room for everything," says Marilyn, "so we opened a shop."

Dennis and Marilyn have a unique philosophy about selling. "We don't think cutthroat business is good. We tend to look at things differently than most people," explained Dennis. "We went from pretty well off to literally homeless a while ago which changes your perspective and what you consider important."

"With our consumable items, we try to find the best quality products and price them fairly," added Dennis. "We look for the good stuff, including certified organic spices and quality essential oils and fragrances."

"We don't want a thrift store," said Marilyn. "Any clothing we sell has been laundered, the stains removed and even ironed. I want things to be clean and presentable."

All of the Nix children are involved, or have been, in helping run the family business. The two oldest children, Esther, 19, who is married and lives in California, and Nathan, 18, who works at Photo Solutions in Vernonia, have worked in the shop in the past. Abby, 16, and Hannah, 14, make jewelry to sell, mind the store and help decorate. Rachel, 10, Sarah, 7, and even Bethany, 5, help dust, sweep, decorate, price items, and clean windows. "The kids are home schooled," says Marilyn, "and after school they can work. Each is finding their own creative niche and offering their ideas."



"Those local handmade items we sell are going to be the collectables of tomorrow," said Dennis.

"We have had good support from the community," said Marilyn. "We have a good faithful following of local people who come in and shop on a regular basis. We are increasing our internet sales and have an active website now. We work hard to make things attractive and interesting. Because this is a bedroom community with lots of commuters, we tend to stay open later and on holidays so locals can shop here."

"Since Stub Stewart Park opened we have seen our foot traffic triple," added Dennis. "I think the park is going to change this town."

For the Nix Family and Cornerstone Naturals, change seems to be a good thing.

Holiday Bucks

It's "Holiday Bucks" time again in Vernonia! Promotion runs from Friday, November 16th to Saturday, December 15th, and is open to all ages.

Purchase \$50 in merchandise* from any of the following businesses, fill out your Holiday Bucks card, and enter to win!

Combined purchases accepted. Purchases in increments of \$5 each. See stores for details.

- Annabelle Antiques & Truffles
- Barlow Bikes & Boards
- BITs & PCs
- Black Bear Coffee Company, LLC
- Buckleberry Cottage
- Café 47
- City of Vernonia
- Creative Memories Ind. Consultant Norina Abeyta
- Creatures & Flowers
- Friends of the Library
- Grey Dawn Gallery
- Jazzercise
- Karmel's Flower Patch
- Muffy's Enterprises
- New Day Massage & Bodyworks
- Out on a Limb
- Pretty Gifts & Things
- Sunday's Best
- The Buckhorn Restaurant & General Store
- The Clever Cricket
- The Independent, LLC
- True Value Hardware
- US Bank, Vernonia
- U.S. Post Office, Vernonia
- V&V Leathers
- Vernonia Community Learning Center
- Vernonia Hardware & Supply, LLC
- Vernonia Realty & Insurance Center
- Vernonia Senior Center
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