

EXPLORING JOYS OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

Columbia-Pacific people left long careers in different industries to own businesses on the Oregon coast

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Moving from one job to another is common. Spending more than a decade in one career and leaving it behind to open a specialty shop isn't. The owners of two businesses on Oregon's coast, however, have done just that, leaving behind corporate careers to open their own stores.

Pat's Pantry

Pat Milliman spent 30 years in the banking industry. Tom Leiner spent nearly that long working for semiconductor businesses. So it was only natural that the couple would open a spice shop together.

The idea for the shop grew out of a career move for Milliman, after she left her corporate banking job to open her own consulting business. When the recession hit, however, her work contracts dried up and she decided it was time for another move, she said. That second jump would be to a part-time job at a spice shop in Portland while she took time to determine her next move.

Leiner faced a similar incentive for a career change when shifting rules in the semiconductor industry left him with the option of moving overseas or finding a new career, he said. He and Milliman met while she was working at the Portland spice shop, and that helped spur the idea for Pat's Pantry.

"She was working at a spice store, after her career change, and I pick her up and we start talking about (that business) and I said, 'We can do that,'" Leiner said.

They both liked Astoria and, after visits and brainstorming sessions, they opened Pat's Pantry in 2012.

Challenges over the first few years included learning about ordering and inventory — something neither



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Tom Leiner holds a sample of crushed aleppo pepper.

of their corporate careers had prepared them for, Milliman said.

"Educating people was another thing," she said. "There are a lot of foodies in the area, they got it, but there would be a lot of people that would come in and be like, 'A spice shop? What?' So it was a lot of outreach."

The business wasn't without their detractors, either. Milliman has had to deal with literal hand-wringing from people worried that the shop wouldn't survive,

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Ground cloves, Kashmiri chili, and Turmeric are all for sale at Pat's Pantry.