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in corporate offices for the past 30 years, with the last 10 years spent at Levi Strauss in Eugene. At a work conference in Florida, it became clear to Deb that her time at Levi's was over. "It was hard because I loved my job, but it was a change time."

Inspired by a friend in Florida who ran a cause-based store focused on human trafficking and subsequent charities, "I felt like there was something I could do out here," said Deb who, along with her husband Kurt, moved to Florence shortly thereafter.

"This thing kept tugging at me that I had to do something to give back," Deb said.

With that in mind, she noticed a lack of somewhere for people in the Florence community to gather together and just be in community. It was through that realization that her vision for The Mustard Seed began.

"I love crafting, and it's also a non-threatening way to meet new people and find a common bond," she said. "So, we started putting together the vision of this place."

While travelling in upstate New York, Deb and her husband encountered the final sign that they were on the right path.

"We saw this organic food store, so we went in. It was called The Mustard Seed," Deb explained. "The scripture for the mustard seed in the bible is Mathew 17:20 and it talks about having a faith that moves mountains and your faith can be smaller than a mustard seed — I was like, 'Okay, this is starting to really come together.'"

The Vander Bogarts wanted the space to be a place that "paid it forward," which to Deb meant following a business model where she was able to pay off her initial investment in the building and on-going costs for craft supplies, and then donate the rest of her profits to charities.

The couple started looking for properties two years ago, and found 509 Kingwood St., which most recently was Class Act Theatre and, before that, a Christian Science reading room.

"It all came together really well. I think when you're on the right path

with God, he does that for you," Deb said. The couple began renovating the building last November. "It was really a labor of love."

The Vander Bogarts did a lot of work and, along with Dan Lofy Construction, completed the job and opened the doors to The Mustard Seed on June 1.

"It's a place to enjoy life and be in community with other people. Sometimes we miss that in the run around of the day," Deb said.

The Mustard Seed is in essence a crafting space. It also offers a wide variety of classes such as weekly How to Crochet, Christmas in July — where Christmas cards, ornaments and holiday baking classes will be taught — and even a Making Kimchi class on July 16.

"We're trying to get a variety of things, but we are also trying to let the community help us decide what to do. We want people to have this place to go to," Deb said.

The Mustard Seed is open daily by 10 a.m. except Sunday, when it opens at noon. There is a daily membership rate of \$10 for those who want to simply drop in, and there is always coffee, tea or something cold to drink, along with snacks out. While community members can drop in and use all the crafting materials, there are also games, cards and puzzles.

"There's a lot of good space and people can really just be together in community," Deb said.

Each class has its own price separate from the daily drop in rate, and a calendar of all upcoming classes and events with prices can be found online at www.themustardseed1720.com.

"We wanted a place where people really felt comfortable and really felt at home — that they could really relax here," Deb said.

Ultimately, The Mustard Seed is, at its core, a place to give back.

"Our plan is really to pay the bills for the building and then give the rest away to a variety of places," said Deb, who also works with a charity called Shared Hope out of Vancouver, Wash., which is working to end human trafficking. Deb explained that a lot of human trafficking is concentrated along the I-5 north and south corridors, but that the crime is moving towards Highway 101 as I-5 becomes more



VICTORIA SANCHEZ/SIUSLAW NEWS

The Mustard Seed, a crafting and community space at 509 Kingwood St. in Florence, is now open for people to come together to create art and build relationships.

regulated. The Mustard Seed plans to donate any profits to organizations like Shared Hope.

In addition, Deb plans to host seminars at The Mustard Seed aimed at informing people on the issue of human trafficking, as well as clean water initiatives and other charitable efforts. She'll also offer resources for how people can get involved and make a difference.

"It fosters this sense of doing good that The Mustard Seed itself is fostered on," she said.

The Mustard Seed wants to serve as a space of learning and coming together as a community to promote change and positive actions in and out of the area.

"We're definitely not trying to take any political stance," Deb said. "But we certainly want to make people aware of how this can be a better place, how we can be more engaged in the place we live right here."

Inside The Mustard Seed, there are two "hope jars" in the kitchen and crafting area where visitors can donate directly to the facility's monthly rotating charity. In July, the charity is Alzheimer's Disease, in memory of Deb's mother, who passed away from dementia.

The Mustard Seed is also available to rent for any organization that needs a space to meet, which comes with an hourly fee. The fee

will be waived for nonprofits hoping to use the space, but Deb asks that they make a donation of any amount to the hope jars.

"For a nonprofit, it's hard to find a place to meet that doesn't cost you something, so we want to be able to help our local nonprofits with places to meet and go," Deb said.

The Mustard Seed also serves as a retail space for other pay-it-forward companies, and has three retailers currently selling within the space. Abel is a leather handbag and accessory company based in Tennessee that employs women who are transitioning out of shelters or domestic abuse situations and teaches them how to make jewelry to sell. Abel also provides jobs for women in Ethiopia who handmake all of Abel's leather bags. Sandcloud sells cotton beach blankets to help fund ocean preservation. It also donates to the Surfrider Foundation, which has a local chapter in Florence. The Giving Keys sells jewelry to provide jobs for those transitioning from homelessness.

All three retailers sell their products at The Mustard Seed. Deb says she chose these three companies because they pay their employees living wages and they all have consistent pricing methods, meaning the price of their products won't suddenly rise.

"The companies allow people to

be self-sufficient, for some of them, for the first time. All of our companies will have a pay-it-forward purpose," Deb said.

The Mustard Seed doesn't make any profit from these separate retailers, but instead serves as a space for them to sell their product.

Deb said she supports their philanthropy while allowing The Mustard Seed to have another way to contribute, give back and support small businesses that are trying to do something bigger and better.

In addition, The Mustard Seed isn't a place specifically for children, but rather for families — so they have an opportunity to bond with each other while learning something new.

"That's all this is. It's a place for people to come together and feel better, learn something new, do something they love and just enjoy life because life is short. We should take advantage of it while we're here," Deb said. "The whole thing came from my faith and what God is doing in my life. My idea of faith is pretty simple: I love God and therefore, I love people. All people. So hopefully when people come here, they feel loved. That's really the premise behind it."

The Mustard Seed can be reached at www.themustardseed1720.com or on Facebook.

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