

Open 4 Business – Business Summaries

Avoca – Avoca Flower Shop

Located in Avoca's downtown Main Street District, where it's been a community staple for the last 50 years, Avoca Flower Shop strives to provide the ultimate antidote to any bad day with their beautiful floral arrangements, balloons, plants and gifts. As a natural entrepreneur and someone whose been in the flower industry since her childhood when her mother worked at the store, owner Linsey McCarthy dreams of improving the store's inventory, improving the business's marketing efforts, and collaborating more with local businesses to make downtown Avoca an exciting shopping destination.

This grant would provide the necessary funding for the flower shop to achieve these dreams. Inside the store, fresh and new displays and events like the shop's Sips and Stems class would excite current and new customers alike, while marketing efforts in nearby communities would be created to attract new customers to Avoca. Linsey would also love to increase the shop's social media efforts and hire a part-time social media director in the future.

These efforts would only enhance the store's current legacy of success. Linsey believes her business has a great competitive advantage over other shops in the industry because of her store's excellent customer service and satisfaction. Customers often leave her store feeling better than when they arrived, a reaction that resulted in the store earning the Western Iowa Development Association's (WIDA) Friendliest Staff Award.

Dubuque – Midwest Girl

Six years ago, sisters Marissa Hoffmann and Marah Odgers together dreamed of opening and growing a business that would help these Midwest girls celebrate their family traditions and roots, something they felt was missing in Iowa and its neighboring states. This idea grew into an ecommerce brand and apparel business that has since opened several retail stores in rural communities in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois.

Their newest shop in Dubuque sells apparel and gifts such a t-shirts, sweatshirts, coffee mugs, hats and more, and has become the brand's new home. Adding to Dubuque's vibrant downtown and shopping opportunities, this store has already greatly contributed to the community, an achievement that earned them the 2020 Excellence Award from Dubuque Main Street. Now, they're hoping to expand this business that, instead of simply selling transactional trends like their competitors, sells the story of Midwest roots.

With this funding, Dubuque's Midwest Girl would improve its equipment and retail display, inventory and storage along with its marketing efforts. Marissa and Marah are eager to reach

the other nine Midwest states. They believe this can be achieved through improving their website and social media efforts and hiring a full-time designer, manager, and two part-time key holders.

Marion – The Grill Works

For the last 11 years, Lisa and Brian Gilliat have been serving their customers and community through their store, The Grill Works. What started at a shop that sold grills and parts quickly expanded into a full retail shop that sells gas and charcoal grills with lifetime warranties and 300 sauces and rubs, and hosts events such as grilling competitions and free monthly cooking classes. Fun fact: they are the largest U.S. dealer for the Green Mountain Pellet Grill.

The Grill Works not only sells its products, they also service every grill they sell, a unique trait that proved valuable after the derecho hit. They travelled the state assisting in cleanup and grill maintenance. Their customer satisfaction is so high that many of their employees started as customers with a passion for cooking that fell in love with the business and its community values. As the business continues to grow, so do the Gilliat's dreams of expanding the business. Last year, they purchased the building adjacent to their property and turned it into an office space, which allowed them to expand. They've also started building an outdoor kitchen they will use for classes, demonstrations, samples or simply to cook lunch for their employees.

With this funding, they would finish building the outdoor kitchen as well as expand their website to include online sales of all products, providing the opportunity to grow nationwide. They also have dreams of purchasing a mobile showroom to allow the business to appear at events and visit small towns across the state.

Mount Vernon – Bauman and Company

Bauman and Company has been a cornerstone in Mount Vernon for over 100 years, and owners Josh and Olivia Randall want to maintain and improve the business's impressive and historic legacy. What started as a premier retail store for men's formal clothing has since grown to include women's and shoe departments and accessories. The business's basement is also home to a community coffee club where 15-20 members of the community gather every morning Monday through Saturday for a casual chat.

Bauman's history makes it a truly unique historical and retail destination. As the oldest business in town, a step through its doors is a step back in time as much of the building's historic charm has been preserved, such as its beautiful quartersawn oak cabinets. The store plays a valuable role in Mount Vernon's downtown community and is an active participant in community events.

This funding would allow the business to improve its space and its marketing efforts. After renovating its loft to triple its square footage and make more room for the women's department, the Randall's now want to renovate the basement into a full shoe department complete with slat walls for display with storage behind for inventory. With the growth of this department, they want to collaborate with local chiropractors and physical therapists to help fit people with shoes that not only look good but are good for their bodies. Additionally, the funding would be used to improve their marketing efforts and add more U.S. and locally made, sustainable products.

Woodbine – The Stitchin' Tree

What started out as a traditional brick and mortar retail space for quilting enthusiasts has since grown into a valuable hands-on resource and community space. Owner Teresa Coenen, a pattern designer and quilting teacher, brought her skills to Woodbine to offer sales of licensed, reproducible patterns and quilt-along Zoom demonstrations that attracted hundreds of participants and greatly increased sales in her store.

What makes The Stitchin' Tree unique is that it's not only a retail space, but also a maker's space where participants of the quilt-along series can experience Teresa's teaching up close and in person.

With this funding, Teresa would be able to complete renovations that would combine the shop's retail and storage to create more space for a beautiful quilting video studio. This studio would help enhance the business's marketing efforts through growing and improving the quality of the quilt-alongs and providing the opportunity to create more content for YouTube and Facebook Watch, as well as connect with local businesses and schools to offer her space for their own video projects. Teresa also dreams of creating a Quilt Every Day mobile app that would include in-app advertisements and increasing the workforce to include at least two part-time employees and one contracted employee.