

Fairport-East Rochester Post

Fairport bike shop celebrates 40th anniversary

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Fairport, N.Y. — Howard Sharp was just 18 when he started his job search.

In 1971, he had just graduated from Penfield High School and his only work experience was pumping gas and doing repair work at a lawn and garden store.

“The only plan I had was being in business for myself,” said Sharp, now 60.

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So the next year, he emptied his savings to open a small lawn and garden shop, which he ran out of a vacant house at the Four Corners of Penfield. It would be two years before he started to carry bikes, which at the time were growing in popularity.

He would buy three bikes at a time, prop them up on their kickstands and sell them. Sharp named the business Recreational Vehicles and Equipment, or RV&E for short.

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In 1973 the store property was sold to Friendly's and Sharp moved his “business in a box” across the street. The next year, he was forced to move again when that property was converted into a 7/11 service station.

At that point, Sharp had to decide where to go next.

“Seventy percent of my receipts were from the 14450 (zip code),” he said. “I decided I was going to the direction of people who are supporting me, and it’s probably one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

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What's this?

Howard split his time running his bike shop and operating a hunting and fishing store with a business partner in Fairport. Then one day, he noticed a vacant building on North Main Street — the former chicken hatchery that had since fallen into disrepair and was scheduled for demolition.

Within 24 hours, he bought the building. Today, Sharp admits that moving his bike business into an empty shop was a leap of faith.

“I borrowed from everybody,” Sharp recalls. “I thought, ‘This place is great, but I have no inventory,’” he said with a laugh.

This year marks the business’s 40th anniversary. Sharp says he couldn’t have done it without the help of his staff, including long-time employees Dan Joensen and Andy Thompson, who help run the Fairport store and a second location in Canandaigua.

You won’t see anything ordered or filed electronically in either store — Sharp still uses pen and paper.

His son Doug, now 33, has worked alongside him since the age of 12. While his dad isn’t a cycling enthusiast, Doug started an annual mountain biking race in Perinton called the Farmall Hill Challenge, which has been going strong every year.

Doug’s wife Dana has also completed two Ironman competitions and teaches cycling classes. Like many families in Fairport, they enjoy biking along the canal with their children. Doug said the demographic of bikers includes people of all ages and skill levels. By helping customers at the shop, he said the staff can help people grow.

“That community is always evolving, but there’s always a lot more people looking for that next goal,” he said.

Howard hopes to retire at 62 and pass the business down to his son. It’s a family business, and the same is true of their customers, as children and grandchildren from across the region come to be served. After 40 years, it’s proof that hard work really does pay off.

“It’s a huge accomplishment to be able to hang on in small business as many years as I have,” said Sharp, adding, “It’s been a good ride.”

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