

SUCCESS STORY

DEVILS LAKE 2022



THE FURNITURE CONNECTION

ROLLA – Sue Nelson's business journey has evolved tremendously over the past 34 years. What started out as a small consignment shop has turned into a full-fledged furniture store. With several years of guidance from the ND SBDC, Sue was able to transform her business and open the Furniture Connection in July 2020.

When Sue was just four years old, she received her first cash register. She played "store" with three of her siblings, and often got to be the "store owner." When she was just 11 years old, she got her first job in a restaurant. At

the age of 15, the bakery Sue was working at shut their doors, and the owner of a local hardware store asked her to work for him because of her work ethic and customer service. Sue enjoyed working retail. She said, "I felt it was my calling, but I still tried other majors in college such as social work and elementary teaching, but all the business courses were my favorite."

After getting married, Sue had a bookkeeping job, but soon after, she started a consignment shop with the encouragement from her sister, Nancy, called The Clothing Connection. At the time,

this was a good financial decision, as it didn't require an investment in inventory. The consignment shop opened on April 30th, 1988 and was an immediate success. The customer base grew, and they had consignment clients from all around the area, even Canada. With this success, Sue started adding new affordable children's clothing and winter outdoor just to keep up with demand. Soon they outgrew the 600 square foot space they were in, and her husband, brother-in-law, and friend built a new 2400 square foot building. They opened this new space on April 4th, 1994. Early in 2000, they





website. Sue's friend really encouraged her to become a dealer of this brand. Soon after, she was approved to become a Signature Design by Ashley dealer and it completely changed the business. In July 2020, they became exclusively a furniture store, renaming their business to The Furniture Connection.

Transitioning the business to a furniture store during the global pandemic was a difficult challenge for Sue. They have had to overcome very serious

product shortages and inventory management challenges. In addition to this, shipping rates are higher due to the businesses location, another difficult challenge.

began to get furniture loads from LTD Commodities, however, the loads were very labor intensive and required a large storage space. After deciding to stop these loads of furniture, they got new furniture from states such as California, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Ohio. Although they were running out of space, they still had a lot of interest in these larger items.

Since The Furniture Connection opened in 2020, the business has had to move locations again. In July 2021, they were able to move to a 9,500 square foot building and have grown their employee count to nine people.

In 2019, a customer and friend of Sue's inquired about getting furniture from Ashley Furniture's

Along with community and regional support, Sue has had the support of the ND SBDC for many years. Sue first heard about the ND SBDC when she took a class from the Lake Region Community College in Devils Lake in 1998. Her store served as the classroom, and the class was sponsored by the Small Business Administration (SBA.) Sue said, "The information was very substantial and very helpful." In addition to the information she received, she was also able to obtain an SBA guaranteed loan in the early 2000's.

When Sue started carrying furniture in her store, she said, "I just wasn't sure how to proceed in a furniture business. The inventory cost was extreme, and we needed to invest in a huge inventory when it was difficult to get product." Ashley Louw, ND SBDC advisor in Devils Lake, helped Sue see how valuable it was to have the inventory in stock and helped her obtain an inventory loan from the North Central Planning Council. Ashley was also able to help Sue get a conservative three-year projection plan.

Sue worked hard to create what the business is today. She said, "I



just kept going, even when times were hard.” However, Sue is now able to take time off, as her daughter and her family recently moved back to Rolla. Sue said, “I love owning my own business by being able to provide a great service and needed product to our area. I also love that I have been able to include my daughter on this journey, as she is now managing the store.”

“The encouragement and direction of our business is on the top of the NDSBDC’s agenda. They walk beside us every step of the way,” said Sue. When asked if she



has any advice for other aspiring entrepreneurs, she stated, “If you’re beginning a business, ask potential customers if they would shop at this new business. Get approval from family because it will take time to get started and

you often don’t have set hours. There will be many long hours of work and planning. Get advice and information from people who have worked with other business owners. Therefore, I recommend to not walk but run to your nearest SBDC office. Get on a friend basis with them. Their workshops, training, and information are always timely and the most important resource you can have in your corner.”



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