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Owners rebuild after impact fee nightmare, open shop in new location

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Photos



Shoppers Village owners Russ Haun and Liz Klen with puppy Roseabelle, who is up for adoption at their shop.

ANDREA GALABINSKI

Fact Box

NEW LOCATION

Store: Shoppers Village, 110 Pondella Rd.

Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m. -6 p.m.,

Saturday, noon-6 p.m., closed Sun. and Mon.

Phone number: 567-2800

Last April, the owners of Shoppers Village Mall said they were involved in a nightmare. They closed down shop, due to what they said was a surprise bill of \$58,000.

Liz Klen and long-time partner Russ Haun have just reopened their business as Shoppers Village (minus the "Mall") a new location on Pondella Road, directly across from the Lee County Sheriff's Office North Fort Myers Substation. They said they learned some big lessons from their past experience.

The two had just opened their old shop last year in a location at 19751 N. Tamiami Trail in North Fort Myers when they were told by Lee County officials that they owed the \$58,000 in impact fees, fees the two said they had no idea they would have to pay.

Klen said they thought they had followed all the proper procedures and understood everything about opening there. She said she thought they had the proper Lee County permitting and code compliance. Then, after being open there a month, code violations started coming in. The first was for a flag.

"We had a code violation on an 'open flag' so I went down (to the county offices.) I thought, no big deal, so I took it down and went to take care of it. When I was trying to make corrections for any problems, and we'd already been open about two months, that's when they told me I had the impact fees. I was devastated," she said at the time in a Neighbor interview.

The impact fees of \$58,000 were charged because of a change in use in the building. They were using warehouse space for retail operations. She said if she had known about the fees, they never would have even considered renting the building.

When the county was asked to comment at the time, Lee County Building Official Bob Stewart said, "It's a very unfortunate situation."

He said that the proposed floor plans were copied from previous floor plans from a previous tenant, and that's where the "disconnect" happened.

"The intent of our procedures are that we get a proposed floor plan for what use of the building the new business is going to make, and in looking it over the plan provided retail up front, storage in the back, no change," he continued then. He also said there was nothing he could do.

With the looming payment the owners were forced to close up shop, and decided to have an auction to try to recoup some of the money they had invested into the business that were already spent.

"We sold whole walls, shelving and all, for sometimes \$10," said Haun. "We lost a lot of money and we were emotionally destroyed because of the stress."

There was a lot of grieving by the two, who said they took six months off to try to get over the

situation.

Now they have opened their new shop with a positive attitude. The new Shoppers Village is a scaled down version of their old business, focusing on collectibles, videos and CDs and computer games. It also has a very small pet adoption service which they say took off right away.

"We had five dogs that were found in a box and we already have four adopted."

If you like Hot Wheel cars, you'll go crazy at the shop.

"We have what are called 'redlines' you can see the redlines in their tires, that's a good collectable car," said Haun. They deal mostly in collectibles pre-1970s like the Hot Wheels.

"Our other big thing is the video games - for Xbox, Nintendo, PlayStation - we have the original video games for kids of all ages."

They said that dealing with Lee County this go-round was a very good experience.

"It was very thorough and we were approved fairly quickly," said Klen.

"I'm sure that from our prior experience, something was learned on both sides," commented the county's Stewart this week. "I'm glad that we have a customer that was pleased with dealing with Lee County, and I hope they are very successful."

The two owners said they warn those thinking of opening a business, especially in an older building common in North Fort Myers, to be vigilant.

"Don't assume anything," said Haun.

Klen suggested attending classes held by the county on the subject, which she said were informative.

The two welcome old customers and new ones to their new location, 110 Pondella Rd. Hours of operation are Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday noon to 6 p.m., closed Sunday and Monday. The phone number is 567-2800.

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