

BACK MOUNTAIN BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: WILD BIRDS UNLIMITED

Couple makes hobby of bird watching their new business

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A small sparrow flies across the parking lot of the Dallas Shopping Center, landing on a birdfeeder by the sidewalk. Above, more birds perch on a sign which reads, "Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop," identifying the source of the birdseed.

Inside the small shop, customer Rick Fuhrer, of Blakeslee, chats about the feathered friends and other creatures in his own backyard while stocking up on peanuts "to keep the blue jays happy."

While his bill is totaled, Fuhrer tells a story about the blue jays and squirrels fighting for the peanuts he puts out each morning, adding that woodpeckers enjoy

peanuts as well, but prefer them shelled and crushed into smaller pieces.

As Fuhrer completes his transaction and heads out the door, more customers enter and begin to browse the shelves and displays.

So begins a day at Wild Birds Unlimited.

Gary and Joann Kostrobala, new owners of the local franchise, said their favorite part of running the store is talking with the customers and hearing their stories.

"Everybody comes in and they're excited about who was in their backyard this week and what birds they've seen," Joann said. "And there's a lot of excitement around it."

"We bring people and nature together," added Gary. "That's actually our motto. It's a place



A male house sparrow perches on a "d" in the Wild Birds Unlimited sign at the Dallas Shopping Center storefront.

where people can come in and actually talk about what they've seen and be excited about it. We have a lot of fun interacting with the customers."

Before the Dallas couple purchased the shop on Oct. 15, 2012,



Rick Fuhrer, of Blakeslee, right, purchases a bag of peanuts to "keep the blue jays happy" at left, Wild Birds Unlimited co-owner Joann Kostrobala rings up the order.

they were customers there.

"We've always loved bird feeding and bird watching," said Joann.

So, after recently losing their jobs, Gary said, "We figured why not combine the hobby with a way to make a living?"

The shop offers a variety of

goods, most geared specifically toward hobbyists, and the rest promoted as gift items.

The Kostrobalas said their top seller is the birdseed, which comes in large and small bags and a selection of different blends made to attract certain species.

Other merchandise includes birdfeeders, birdbaths, bird-

houses, binoculars, field guides, children's toys and more.

The shop also hosts various birding related workshops and activities throughout the year and the owners offer free pamphlets and advice to those who come in with questions about the hobby.

**MEET THE OWNERS:
GARY AND JOANN KOSTROBALA**

Favorite backyard birds: Cardinals and woodpeckers
Best birding locations: The Everglades in Florida and Ricketts Glen State Park

Most notable birding memories: Seeing condors at the Grand Canyon and a bald eagle at Frances Slocum State Park

Most unusual bird you've checked off your life list: Pelicans in Mexico
Other hobbies and interests: Hiking in state and national parks, sports and the outdoors

Free upcoming events

Birds of prey program, 1 p.m., March 9 at Wild Birds Unlimited.
Bird walk, 8:30 a.m., March 16 at Frances Slocum State Park

Fledgling tips

Gary Kostrobala, owner, Wild Birds Unlimited, offers the following tips to new birdwatchers:

"Start off slow and economical." You don't need to spend a lot of money to start out. You can buy a basic feeder and small bag of birdseed to try it out.

Be patient. "You're not necessarily going to see a bird at your feeders on day one. Sometime, it takes up to a week or two but once they know the food is there, they're going to be coming back."

"Get a bird book." As you begin to see more bird species at your feeder, the next step is to purchase a field guide to help identify them.



Joann and Gary Kostrobala, owners of Wild Birds Unlimited in Dallas, are shown in their shop in this photo taken on Ash Wednesday.

Discount prom dresses at WU

Budget-minded high school girls looking for great prom dresses at modest prices will get some help from Wilkes University students in March. Students involved in the university's Relay for Life event benefiting the American Cancer Society are collecting gently-used prom dresses from now until March 16.

The dresses will be sold from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on March 16 at an event on the first floor of the Henry Student Center, 84 W. South St., Wilkes-Barre. The minimum donation for a dress will be \$20. All money raised will be contributed to Relay for Life.

Individuals wishing to donate dresses for the sale can take them to a collection table in the Henry Student Center from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Feb. 19, 26, March 12 and March 14.

Dresses also will be accepted on the day of the event.

For more information, contact event organizer Katherine Cicone at katherine.cicone@wilkes.edu.

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