



Swings  
Fore  
Strings  
Page 3

Enhancing & Promoting the Economic Vitality of Central Oregon Since 1994

## Q&A with Drew Cogen

Owner of Postal Connections  
& Bend South Liquors



(L-R) ALLISON AND DREW COGEN | COURTESY OF DREW COGEN

### 1. Why did you decide to open the gift shops in Bend South Liquor and Postal Connections?

My wife and I like to shop, especially for locally made products, however there wasn't anywhere to shop at the South end of town. We thought our Postal Connections business could lend itself well to starting a quasi-gift shop in our little 900 square foot store. We felt like it was a smart move that would benefit both the Bend community and our current businesses. It is surprising to people, since they are never expecting to see so many gift items in our store, but the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

### 2. What was the process of adding on an additional business like, and how do you decide which products to hold in your shop?

The first thing we started selling were "slumps", handmade drinking glasses and vases made from recycled glass bottles, made by one of our customers, Elise Clark, who went on to build a successful business called Malakai Creations. Elise came in one day and asked if we would like to consign them. At the time, we had zero retail display areas, so my wife and I drove to Portland and came back with our first Ikea shelving unit and immediately filled it with slumps.

The slumps continued to sell quite well and was a great supplement to our monthly sales as we worked to build our customer base and add additional products and services. We continued to add products almost exclusively from Bend or Oregon. We would, and still do, buy new items all the time and sell them on consignment or buy them outright wholesale from local vendors.

### 3. What were your first successful products sold?

The first product that really took off were the Malakai Creations Slumps. While we were only able to offer a limited amount of inventory, we were able to help educate the public and point people to the Bend Saturday Market where they could find Elise and a

Q&A

Continued from page 1

larger selection. Our next three products to carry were Dani Naturals, Silipint, and Hydro Flask, all Bend based companies that have seen tremendous growth.

### 4. How do you market your gift shop and its products?

Most of our retail items sell from customers coming into the store typically to do other things while they're here already. The majority of what we sell are priced under \$20 and physically small, so they can easily be thrown into a package already being mailed out for someone's birthday, anniversary, Mother's Day, etc. When we get new items in, we promote them on our Facebook page through targeted and short-term marketing campaigns. Leading up to Thanksgiving each year, we host "Seven Days of Giving" on our Facebook page. This helps to boost interaction and get customers on our page to see what we have going on in stores.

### 5. Why do you feel that it is so important to support the local community and other entrepreneurs?

It's always important to support local products and entrepreneurs whenever possible over national, big box alternatives.

By supporting your local community, you create a nicer place to live and help to boost the local economy, and more times than not, when you buy local you end up with better customer service and a higher quality product. We do this for the retail items we sell like hats, earrings, lotions, soaps, water bottles, cups, etc. but also our boxes, bubble wrap, and packing peanuts. We employ 4-5 hourly employees at any one time plus a host of other service people, including our delivery drivers for the major shipping carriers, delivery personnel for our local office supplies, cable, computer, and electric services repair. More specifically, we support Bend broadband (cable, internet, phones), Paul the Computer Guy, West Coast Paper (Redmond, OR), and Marathon Business Solutions (copy machines and service, Redmond, OR).

### 6. How has having multiple businesses impacted your other businesses?

Having multiple businesses has helped us to create new contacts and form trusted relationships with other entrepreneurs we would not have met otherwise. For instance we connected with Atlas Cider, a Bend based brewery, through our liquor store and were able to create a relationship with their team and helped to coordinate the logistics of shipping their product nationally with our Postal



PHOTO | COURTESY OF DREW COGEN

Connections business and continue that relationship to this day.

### 7. What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs?

Adding new products can get expensive, especially if it is an untested item and it doesn't sell. Buying on consignment can really help with your carrying costs and reducing your exposure to getting stuck with a surplus of items that really looked and sounded good at the time, but it was either not what your customers were looking for

or not at the right price point. At the same time, if there's nothing to buy or customers are sick of seeing the same stuff over and over, it's probably time to try new products. Consignment can be less profitable, but is also less risky which is perfect for new entrepreneurs. A good idea is to start out on consignment then once you find a good price point, negotiate the best possible wholesale rate so that you have some wiggle room to put things on sale, or worst case on clearance, but still break even.