

Motor Oil to Mozzarella

The Stanford General Store

By Anne Groebner

About nine miles east of Show Low, on State Route 60 towards Springerville, is a small community known as the Y. It's where Highway 61 veers to the left toward Concho and then St. Johns. It's the kind of place that if you didn't know about it, you might just drive by. But if you stopped, you would find, tucked into the side of Arizona Route 61, a general store that is not only the hub of this small community but a trending country destination that is a one-stop shop for just about anything and a local hang-out for just about everybody.

After living in the Concho area since 1995 and running another business called Global Environmental Consulting (GEC), Jon and Kate Dahl decided to build the Stanford General Store (SGS). They started construction in 2010 and opened on January 29th, 2011 – Jon's birthday. After 10 years of running all over the country as a Master's prepared environmental scientist, Jon got tired. Now their son Jesse and another environmental scientist are running GEC and Jon and Kate are running the store. When I asked them to tell me about the store, Jon answered "Motor Oil to Mozzarella." After the tour I was given, I discovered he was right.

The store is sited on several acres of land that supports a plethora of necessities from a grocery/produce store and delicatessen, bulk water from a 10,000-gallon tank, a gas station, a hardware store, a lumber store (coming soon), and an automotive store to a U-Haul rental store and a newly built outdoor bar, called the Y-Bar, to go with their newly acquired liquor license. They also have laundry facilities and a shower that is open to the public. As Jon gave me a tour of the facilities (with the help of his poodle named Juno), I could tell that all of it was built with the community in mind. "We are a community and everyone is welcome," Jon told me.

They continually bring the products and services that their customers ask for. They both pride themselves on being good listeners and communicators. Every month, they hold a community meeting at the Y-Bar. It's a way to keep track of people who can bring certain skills and talents to the table. In fact, they keep a board outside with grids and columns where bonafide vendors post their crafts and/or skills – but -- "Not just anybody can put their name on it." Jon says.

Both Jon and Kate talk a lot about ethics. "Ethics is how you get things done," explained Jon, "You have to put in all of your money (and Kate inserts "and then some") and continue to commit your money to prove it." Ethics to them means to be good communicators, presenters and facilitators and sharing information that they have. "We have the capacity to do a lot of work," says Jon, "Everything from planning and designing to operating a backhoe. Kate drives to town to get the stuff we need and I dig a hole with the backhoe – we bring all of our skills forward." Jon took all his funds from his 401k and invested it all into the store "but we have no debt." Jon says – and they have no expectations. They give in the form of emotional and mental energy. "We do a lot of hugging," says Kate and Jon says, "She does the hugging and I do the shrugging."

Jon is a Vietnam Navy Veteran. He served on the John A. Bole Destroyer (known as a tin-can sailor). His friend John is also a Vietnam Veteran and he served on the John A. Bole Destroyer at the same time as Jon but the first time they met was at the Stanford General Store. On any given day, you can hang out in "Netties" Deli, located in the store, or in the Y-Bar, located outside on the west side of the store, and hear plenty of military stories. "We are proud of our

military service.” Jon says. Kate was a deployment wife — she stayed home while he went to war and, after 48 years of marriage, they have been through a lot together and feel that they have been given a gift. Now they do what they can for Veteran causes. Next year, Jon will take over as Commander of the VFW Post in Show Low and Kate will be the President of the Auxiliary for one to two years. So, they want people to know that they are Military oriented — but not war mongers. Jon tells me he put a Vietnam sticker on Kate’s car and then she put one next to it that says, “Make Love Not War.” “We have been there and done that and now we respect all of the people fighting for us today,” Jon avers. In honor of all the military services, they have hung flags throughout the Y-Bar. “We know that our customers really appreciate it.”

Jon and Kate are constructing not only buildings but a haven. “We are investing in the community and it’s fun,” commented Jon, “I don’t mind spending all of the money it takes to grow this. We just have to continue to contribute all we can and listen to the people who live around here — listen to their needs, requests and desires and try to accommodate them. That way we are more sustainable than if we don’t listen and go blindly in a direction that’s not helping the community.”

I have to say it took longer than usual to interview both Jon and Kate. Everyone who came in the store had something to say to them. I could see that everyone held them in the highest esteem — from their customers and friends to their vendors. In fact, I spotted the Hensley Beverage Company salesman, Tommy Romo, cleaning the Deli window while I was talking to them. Even their contractor, Shiloh, who is building the bar (originally from Charlie Clark’s) for the Y-bar was going out of his way by putting in special inlay finishes. He swore me to secrecy, however, so you’ll have to take a trip there to see his masterpiece. In fact, you will have visit the Y-Bar for the live entertainment every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. But make sure you get there early. The bar is open all day but this is country living and they turn out the lights at 7 pm!