

# A Walk Down Main Street: Jerseyville, Illinois

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*Each month, reporter Cory Davenport takes a walk down a popular street in a town within the coverage area of Riverbender.com and stops by several local businesses to ask how things are going. In late January, he walked down State Street in Jerseyville and dropped in on Midwest Tropical Fish, Linn's Shoe Store and Ruby and Ellie's Dollarama.*

**JERSEYVILLE** - With its newly-expanded TIF district and news of incoming industry, Jerseyville was an obvious choice for January's "Walk Down Main Street."

**Midwest Tropical Fish, LLC**, located at 214 S. State St., has eye-catching signage on the outside and eye-catching fish on the inside. Owner **Warren Crabtree** said the store

is the latest manifestation of a hobby he has maintained throughout his life - breeding exotic fish. He said customers come from as far away as Kentucky, Cook County, Illinois, Southern Missouri and Indiana to meet their exotic fish needs. Crabtree said the people of Jerseyville have been very supportive of his business.

"It just keeps growing and growing," he said. "Jerseyville in general is great for hometown businesses. They support it more than they support corporations. If I don't stock it, 90 percent of our customers are willing to wait for it to be shipped in."

Quality is what Crabtree said he values more than quantity. He said some of his fish and equipment may be more expensive than it may be at other places, but he assures his stock is of the utmost quality. Crabtree said many of the fish he sells and breeds come directly from the wilds of exotic places such as Brazil and Africa, and they are quarantined in Florida after being shipped into the U.S.

"We do a lot of breeding," he said, "including high-end stock."

Midwest Tropical Fish, LLC, is the latest of Crabtree's endeavors. Most recently, he ran **Underwater Treasures** in Cottage Hills, but said he was forced to close and rejoin the normal workforce after the economy "went to crap" in 2008.

Following that closure, Crabtree began breeding fish as a hobby in his basement. Soon, he ran out of space and Midwest Tropical Fish, LLC was born.

Since opening, Crabtree said he has been involved in several community-oriented events, often donating fish to church fundraisers as well as the local library.

Besides fish, Crabtree said he carries "common reptiles" in the shop, such as bearded dragons, which are easy to maintain and popular among his customers.

A short walk down the block leads to **Linn's Shoe Store**, located at 114 S State St. in Jerseyville. Owner **David Linn**, who runs the small shoe store with his wife, **Rosa Linn**, said his family has been maintaining that business in that building since the early 1960s. Currently, he said his customer base is still going strong, despite the looming threats of big box stores and internet sales. In fact, David Linn said the internet helps him run his business.

"People go to the websites of different shoe companies and find us," he said. "Most of them list us as an established dealer of their products."

David Linn said State Street has changed a lot since he has been established there. He said it seems to be in a new sort of revitalization, after seeing several businesses come



and go. He said the street was once dotted with various department and specialty stores, but those have all but withered in recent years.

"A lot has changed here over the years," he said.

His wife, Rosa Linn, creates several items for sale in the store, including handmade hats and scarves. She sells several items over the internet, but many of her creations are on display within the brick-and-mortar store as well. David Linn said his wife's creations have created more of a welcome draw to the store.

"We have a lot of customers from around town," he said. "But, people come from all over the area, from Calhoun and Alton and Godfrey, to shop specifically from us."



A jog across the street and a few paces south from the charming Linn's Shoe Store building is the equally-charming signage of **Ruby and Ellie's Dollarama**, located at 117 N. State St. That store, where nearly everything is priced at \$1, was purchased by **Brenda Hedgpeth**. It was named after the original owners' grandchildren, however.

"We decided we liked the name and decided to carry it on," Hedgpeth said. "We're coming up on our one year anniversary actually. It's been a crazy year."

Hedgpeth said she wanted to carry the spirit of the Dollarama, because she believes Jerseyville "needs a store like this," adding "everyone seems to appreciate it."



"When we took over, they begged us to keep things the same as much as we could," she said. "I feel like the need is there."

She said the City of Jerseyville has been "absolutely great" to her business. She also said she was happy to see Jerseyville changing "in a positive manner."

"They have some grants to refurbish downtown and bring it back to life," she said. "We see a lot of new construction and refurbishing of vacant buildings, putting in loft apartments. A lot of older businesses are also moving to the strip. As time goes, and more businesses open, that will flourish and be good for everyone."



In fact, Hedgpeth's only concern about the location of her store is limited parking, saying she wishes it was better, but admits it is not terrible.

Not everything in the Dollarama is \$1, though. Hedgpeth said some of her clients asked for nicer items, so all items not \$1 are marked with an orange sticker. The dollar selection still includes a wide selection of children's toys, hygiene items, party supplies and houseware. Hedgpeth also said they do lots of helium and latex balloons, which are not easily found elsewhere.

"No one in town does what we do," she assured.

