



Elsah General Store offers unique shopping experience for eagle watchers, tourists, locals

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ELSAH - The Elsah General Store at 22 LaSalle Street in Elsah is a unique business with a dual focus - to be an actual working general store and at same time give visitors from a wider radius a unique and memorable shopping experience, like taking a step back in time.

Elsah is a prime eagle watching location, and Elsay General Store is one of the ten official hot spots listed by the Alton Convention & Visitor's Bureau, so it is a prime destination.

In a message to eagle watchers and visitors, one of the owners Blair Smith said: "We hope you'll stop in to get your card punched, and then take a 'step back in time' at a beautifully restored, old-fashioned general store, located in the heart of historic and picturesque Elsay, Illinois.

"Visit the Elsay General Store to get an Eagle's Watcher's Guidebook and a punch card. After five punches (at FIVE hot spots), head to the Alton Convention and Visitor's Bureau and redeem your punch card for a free eagle watcher's t-shirt. For more information check out <http://www.elsahgeneralstore.com/>."

The store has been open since April 2015. Blair and Dory Smith are the owners of the Elsay General Store.

"We are an actual working general store, serving Elsay and our neighboring communities by providing everyday necessities, grocery items, such as butter, local eggs, milk, cheese, juice, sugar, flour, meats, pasta, cereal, chips, and countless other essentials," Blair Smith said. "At the same time, Elsay General Store would like to give visitors from a wider radius a unique and memorable shopping experience - like taking a step back in time - by offering pottery, cards, books, gifts, collectibles, old fashion candy, vintage bottled soda, ice cream, a pastry counter, and 'the goodies table'. The experience is completed as customers shop inside a beautifully restored building, dating back to the 1870's, with its original counters tops and floors."

One idea that has been a lot of fun, and something the general store has become known for, is its selection of 40 different brands of vintage bottled soda. Visitors to Elsay General Store love to come in and see what's new on the shelves, try a soda they've never had before, or pick out a nostalgic favorite from their childhood.

Another idea that has been very successful, is the store's "Goodies Table."

"We thought our local folks, who don't cross the river very often, would enjoy having an opportunity to purchase some treats that they don't see every day," Blair Smith said. "The store is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, and a part of each day is spent picking up gooey butter cakes from McArthur's Bakery and Ann & Allen Bakers - both from St. Louis, bread from Fazio's Bakery on The Hill, sweet breads from La Bonne Bouchée in Creve Coeur, Billy Goat Chips, Dad's Cookies, Kakao Chocolate, and more. Our 'Goodies Table', situated right in the middle of the store, is loaded with items like these

each week. Related to this is an email newsletter that we send every Wednesday morning telling local friends (about 500 have signed up) ‘what's new this week at the general store’.”

Blair and his wife, Dory, met in Elsah 40 years ago, married, and then lived in several states - “wherever our work took us,” Blair said. In 2003, they landed back in Elsah, and purchased the house at 22 LaSalle Street, with the historic storefront attached.

“At the time, we had no intention of opening a store,” Blair Smith said. “But for the next 12 years, our house was included in Elsah’s Holiday Home Tour. Every year, we decorated the store portion of the house, put some of our dishes and collectables on the shelves so they wouldn’t look empty, and opened it for the house tour visitors.

“As they entered, we noticed their smiles. With the original counters and floors, and things placed on the shelves, it had the look and feel of an old general store. It seemed as if they had been transported back to their childhood days, telling us that our building reminded them of the old store in their home town. And so, it was then that the idea for Elsah General Store began to take shape.”

Blair said three years in, he and Dory have been very pleased how their idea has unfolded.

“One key to our success has been the Village of Elsah. Its seemingly untouched historic presence and beauty has made it a ‘must see’ for visitors from all over the region. People love the drive alongside the Mississippi, and if they know of, or have read anything about Elsah, they pull off the River Road for a lap through the village, just for a chance to soak in some of its rich history and natural beauty. Elsah General Store has been a beneficiary of Elsah’s reputation. People love coming to Elsah, and now they have an opportunity to shop at an old-time general store, stay at one of two lovely bed & breakfast inns, while imagining what life might have been like in a simpler time.”

Blair and Dory’s hopes for the Elsah General Store for the future are:

“We just want this to be a really unique place to shop - one that people tell their friends about,” Blair said. “So, one goal is to (as much as practical) replace as many of our everyday food items as possible with a nostalgic brand, as long as it tastes good, i.e. Hungry Jack Pancake mix is replaced by Fowlers Mill from Ohio (it's the oldest continuously operating mill, still grinding grains between stones, the old school way). We think it's important to carry as many local items as possible, like Bunkhouse Joe Coffee, Rustic Roots eggs, Ringhausen's apple cider, and pure honey from Woodburn Country Store in Bunker Hill.

“But it's equally important for a store like ours to have unique brands that can't be found locally, like Wolferman's English Muffins from Kansas City, Cherry Republic from Michigan, Dutch Kettle Jams from North Carolina, Anderson's Pure Maple Syrup from Wisconsin, and Hadley Pottery from Louisville, KY. So, to the extent that we can keep adding unique, iconic brands, this fits our goal for Elsay General Store.”



Elsah General Store Hours: Wednesday – Saturday: 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Sunday 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Closed Monday & Tuesday

For more info, call Blair Smith at (618) 556-0709 or e-mail elsahgeneralstore@gmail.com. For more info about the store, visit www.ElsahGeneralStore.com

