



## Location, Location, Location meets Expansion, Expansion, Expansion in Rural Kansas 6th Street Fashions & Footwear

Sari Haug started with what she knew she wanted to do. She loved retail, and she wanted to find an opportunity to own her own business while living in a small community.

Haug lived in Concordia, Kansas, 53 miles north of Salina and 30 miles south of the Kansas/Nebraska state line. She grew up in Concordia learning about business from her family's grocery store. She had lived in the larger cities and worked for larger corporations in her adult life, but really wanted to find an opportunity to return to her entrepreneurial roots in her home town.

In the early 2000s, residents living in Concordia had to drive an hour or more to shop for fashion and footwear. While she could see that there was a potential need, could Haug find the right inventory mix and the best quality goods to offer at the right price for the area? Her challenge was a common one that many retailers still face. Some of the most intense competition for small business in rural communities is not against the store down the street, it's against large retailers in large metro areas that have the advantage of size when negotiating with vendors and suppliers.

In 2004 she had her answer and with it 6th Street Fashion & Footwear was open for business.

6th Street started as many small retail businesses do – as a sole proprietorship operating out of a leased location. In 2007, 6th Street capitalized on an opportunity to expand and purchase a previously unoccupied JC Penney building. With assets increasing, the sole proprietorship transitioned to a Subchapter S Corporation. In 2012, a second opportunity, this time in a new community 18 miles from the first, provided 6th Street the opportunity to expand once again.

While the expansion of this small business is not remarkable, what is remarkable, is the fact that 6th Street Fashions & Footwear did it all in rural America.

6th Street Fashions & Footwear capitalized on an identified need in the market for a local fashion and shoe store first in Concordia, and more recently with their latest expansion in Belleville, Kansas. And while the identified need was there, starting a business that will not only survive, but thrive, and expand

in a small community required some intensive team work to make the dream work.



Through the business life of 6th Street, Haug has worked with the Kansas Small Business Development Center (KSBDC) through Wichita State University's outreach center in Concordia. Haug

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has worked over the years with Linda Sutton, KSBDC consultant to develop her business plan and funding as the business has grown over time. Sutton has worked with Haug on financial management, effective use of store space to appeal to customers, and advertising. Haug credits Sutton with

recommending that she work with another small business to develop the 6th Street brand which has paid off tremendously.

When Haug recently was presented with an opportunity to buy a shoe store in a neighboring town, Sutton helped her with the process. Together they worked on financial projections, inventory mix, and how to capitalize on larger quantity buys from Haug's vendors.

Haug highly recommends working with the KSBDC for anyone currently in business. When we asked what she believes is the secret to her small business success, she was happy to share. "Customer service, for sure! I love hearing my customers say, I would have never tried that on, I love it!" And what advice would you give to someone currently in business today? "Your customers should always come first!"

Following the good practice of excellent customer service as well as using sound principles to make good business decisions has kept this winner growing and going in North Central Kansas.

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Assisted by  
Linda Sutton, KSBDC Consultant  
KSBDC at WSU  
Concordia. WSU NCK Outreach | 785.243.9913 |  
ncksbdc.com | ksbdc@ncksbdc.com

Represented by  
Senator Pat Roberts  
Senator Jerry Moran  
Fed. Dist. #1 - Tim Huelskamp  
State Sen. Dist.#36 - Elaine Bowers  
State Rep. Dist.#106 - Sharon Schwartz