

Holbrook's Hardware Store Since "1964"



Pictured above, Amber Hill (at center) and her dedicated staff pause for a quick picture.

Walt's Hardware: Hardware with Heart

by Amie Rodgers

If "home is where the heart is" it certainly stands to reason that your hometown hardware store is vital to maintaining that heart's health. I've lived in a number of small towns in my life and the hardware store has always been a bustling hub of activity and problem solving at home and even around town. Since 1964, Walt's Hardware has been Holbrook's hardware store and much like all small family owned hardware stores around the country, it has been a regular destination for generations of Holbrook residents.

Of course, times have changed significantly since the early days that Walter Portenier ran his hardware store. Route 66 may have left its mark on Holbrook, but since then the information super highway and big box mega stores have forever altered the landscape of small town business pretty much everywhere. Throw in a crippling recession in 2008 and each storefront still operating is a true testament to perseverance and commitment on the part of their owners.

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"When things are hard and recessions hit, it is hard to be in small business. It is hard to continue to support all the things in the community that the community has come to expect from you and still make all the ends meet. Of course, that is one of the things that separates small family owned businesses that are invested in the community from big corporate stores. We don't just give back money. It's easy to give back money when you have it. It is harder to really be a part of the community and know the people," says Amber Hill, owner of Walt's Hardware since 2006.

Amber was born and raised in southern Arizona. She grew up around cattle ranching and excelled in the 4-H and Future Farmers of America programs. "I really am a people person and I like helping people. Ever since I can remember back in 4-H and FFA, I was always oriented towards building business and making things better. I have always been inclined toward that," smiles Amber during our recent interview.

This enterprising girl next door obtained her accounting degree at NAU where she met and married her former husband who was from Holbrook. Since moving to town, Amber has become the mother of three and has worked for organizations such as the Little Colorado River Plateau RC&D, the City of Holbrook, NPC and also revitalized and operated the Roxy Theater.

"In 2005, Walter Portenier (the gentleman who owned the hardware store) wanted to retire, but his kids didn't want to run the business. We bumped into each other through happenstance and mutual acquaintances. We came to a deal and we bought the store from him. I worked here from 2006 until 2012. We were slow to respond to the recession of 2008 and in retrospect, we could've handled it better," notes Amber with a wince and a little knowing smile, "It was really tough on the store. So, I went and got outside work and during that time, my former business partner ran the store."

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Last June, I bought him out and am now the sole owner. Initially, we had to close the doors to do some intense remodeling on the building. We had a lot of cleaning and deferred maintenance to do. My husband Roy has been instrumental and integral to all our efforts and we could not have done it without his hard work, support and fresh ideas. Moving the registers and opening up the front floor space, the petrified rock epoxy finish for local flare on the register counters and the perpetual cleanliness and ongoing improvements at the store are all his doing. On September 30th, we reopened the doors and here we are.”

Walt’s Hardware carries over 19,000 items in stock in their 12,000 square foot location. In addition to what is on hand, they also have direct access to another 74,000 items and the ability to order from thousands of specialized vendors. “We carry all your DIYer supplies like fasteners, nuts, bolts, screws, rope, paint, plumbing and electrical. We carry everything from what you need to change an outlet to what a contractor will need to install a new service. It is a pretty broad selection given that you would find it in two different stores in any bigger town,” says Amber, “One of the compliments we get from customers and vendors is that our store is really spacious, clean and the floors aren’t tight and cramped.” As a Stihl Certified Dealer, Walt’s Hardware also sells and repairs Stihl chainsaws, blowers, trimmers, etc. With ample space to work with, Amber looks forward to expanding the small engine repair shop as well as selection of rental tools.

As part of the store’s reopening success, Amber sought the guidance of Northland Pioneer College’s Small Business Development Center to help with marketing. “My biggest challenge since reopening has been rebranding in whatever forms that takes. I like people and I think I can figure out what makes them happy, but as an accountant it is nice to have help in the creativity department,” she laughs warmly, “It has been great to have help from NPC’s SBDC to really consider my marketing efforts and how to best reach my customers. We have worked with the SBDC on a number of occasions and it has always been a great experience. I would recommend them to any small business owner.”

With the help of NPC’s SBDC and an ever growing inventory, Amber is confident that Walt’s Hardware will remain a valuable resource to Holbrook residents where needed help is sought and every customer is valued. “Our customers come in looking for help with specific issues. They may not remember your name or even what they came in for at times, but they will remember how we made them feel. My perspective on customer service is that you not only need to have what they are looking for, but you’ve got to provide it in a way that is pleasant, memorable and even fun for the customer,” smiles Amber, “I love to tell people at the check out how much we appreciate their business and thank them for coming in. We know they may not have many choices, but they have other choices than coming in to see us. So, we appreciate everyone who comes in.”

Walt’s Hardware is located at 516 W. Hopi Drive in Holbrook. For more information, please call (928) 524-6946 or visit www.waltshardware.com.

