

Susan Fry
Horses and Hounds

The little commercial park is a bit of an odd juxtaposition right in the heart of Connecticut's horse country, but you don't have to get too much closer to figure out that it actually makes perfect sense. The location of her store, just like all the other things Sue Fry (class of 2003) does, suggests a beneath-the-surface wisdom.

Fry is the president and owner of Horses and Hounds, a full service animal feed and grooming store in Granby, CT. It all started with a self-admitted "wacky idea" from a woman with no real background in retail management, but it is now a 12,000 square foot retail space that looks professional throughout every inch. The unique concept is the first of its kind in New England.

The atmosphere is modern and organized but rustic and honest at the same time. The neatly organized rows of top-quality riding boots, for instance, double as a favorite hiding spot for Fry's cat (one of two that roam the aisles). Whatever other animals the staff decide to bring that day (all with Fry's blessing) only add to the ambiance.

The bright-eyed, quick-to-chuckle Fry certainly looks the part of someone enjoying their work. She spends twelve hours a day in her store but doesn't seem to mind. Indeed, she makes the point of telling me that she loves her work and it suits her perfectly. Nothing about her suggests that she puts in a "daily grind".

Three years ago when she was still managing a cardiologist's office, she enrolled in the comprehensive program at

The Entrepreneurial Center to figure out just how realistic this idea was. "That course was really an eye-opener. I learned a lot of the fundamentals there. They really made me work on my business plan and helped me understand what I was getting into."

After a few months of shopping it around, her business plan impressed some reps from the Purina Mills, LLC, who found that it meshed well with their program of "premier stores", or stores that they allow to stock their product and consult with the finer points of retail management. They partnered with her, and decided to make her store the first "premier store" in the entire Northeast. With Purina on board as her major supplier, Fry's dream of a major outlet for horse and dog owners began to take shape.

"Purina helped me with a lot of the retail issues. They taught me about things like turnover, and the degree to which that affects your business. You want merchandise that moves quickly, but at the same time, you need to make sure that you have the supplies you need."



She said, while showing me the warehouse portion of the store, which rivaled anything you would see in a national chain. “I learn new things every day. I paid for the consultants, so I want to make sure that I listen and learn from them.”

Fry continued to explain how she found the confidence to open such a large space with minimal retail experience:

“You have to learn to spend a lot of time working on your plan, and then really sticking to it. It can be difficult, there were many times that I was tempted to try and tinker with things or move them along more quickly. But it takes a lot of patience, dedication, and faith to really work on your plan and you are really best served in sticking to it. I was terrified when I was putting together the financing for this business. I was really worried that I was in over my head. But I had faith in my plan and in my projections, and we’ve been hitting or surpassing our numbers since we opened. You have to believe that you will get your money back.”

Fry’s store has been attracting a lot of attention. Her website and advertising have been attracting clients at a pace far over her projections, and she will be featured for a piece in *The Equine Journal* next month. Her doors opened on April 4, 2006 and she is already thinking expansion. The numbers warrant it. “When you get to that one year or eighteen month point, a lot more suppliers are willing to consider you. That’s what we’re waiting for now, then we can really get some of the merchandise I want in here. The lot out back is for sale, and I could certainly put it to good use once we get there.”

Sue credits her determination and her faith in her plan for her success. “I’ve had people telling me I was crazy, I myself called this all a wacky idea when it started. They never thought I would get to where I am now. Now those people think that I will be finished in six months. But our numbers are over our projections.”

And how does Fry handle all the challenges of being a business owner? “I try to take it one day at a time, since there are always so many battles to fight. I’m always on the phone with suppliers trying to get new product in and sometimes that takes a lot of convincing. But we have a great time around here; this place really is my second home. We have a farm; so being around the animals is natural for me. I couldn’t imagine having a better job.”

Despite all the success she has had, Fry remains humble and dedicated to the service she loves. She is the first to say that she “doesn’t know anything about business” but her conversational manner suggests otherwise. She has made a lot of the right moves by preparing her business plan with the help of professionals, and working with people with industry experience. And while she may be surprised herself getting this far, you would hear a different story from people that worked with Fry through the three-year process from idea to door opening.

It may have been a “wacky idea” a few years ago, but it all seems to make perfect sense now.