



"I'm enjoying sleeping in till 6:00 a.m."...Chuck Van Veen

## **The Story Behind Van Veen Chocolates and the Kitchen Hearth and Crystal Bath Shoppe**

If you've been walking on Franklin Street, you've noticed the windows at the Van Veen Chocolate shop are covered with paper, and if you read your Town Crier (You really should you know. You may think it's all ads, and it is, but there is a lot of information that can be gleaned from ads. Of course you should always continue to read towncriernews.com for the complete story.) (Pardon that lengthy digression.), you will know that there's a new connection between the candy shop and the kitchen shop.

If you know anything of Chuck Van Veen's history, you know this is just another chapter, and the chapters are getting too many to number. He's been a traveling salesman all his life. It's just that the places he travels or the wares he pitches have changed over the years.

Chuck was born and raised in Pella and left in 1964 to join the U.S. Marine Corps. He had met Jill from Long Island at Central College, and when his military duty was completed he went to Long Island for the World's Fair and didn't come back for thirty years. The couple moved frequently as he worked at a feed company on Long Island, in agriculture in Pennsylvania, agricultural sales in Maryland, Mississippi and throughout the south and south-central states, and Minnesota. He was on the road all the time and was getting darned tired of it.

In 1992 he moved to Newton, working on commissioned sales. He used to give away his mother's peanut brittle to his customers. His sister was big into craft shows and suggested he take his mother's peanut brittle to a show in Decorah. He sold his 45 pounds the first day, ran back to Newton, stayed up all night cooking another batch, went back to Decorah and sold out the second day, too. He was hooked on the candy business.

Chuck was in Pella for the first Tulip Time craft show held in West Market Park. Through the years he has sold candy from Shakespeare's Chocolate and Candy Kuchen shops previously in Pella, as well as Grille on the Green.

In 2001 he started remodeling his garage into a cooking kitchen, but always "liked the feeling of being on the street," so took those opportunities to go retail as they came. Last summer, working out of the Van Veen Chocolates kitchen, he couldn't keep up with demand, even cooking from 3:00 a.m. till 9:00 or 10:00 when the shop opened. So he started working on his garage kitchen again.

A light bulb turned on when he passed Kitchen Hearth in Feb. and saw a Valentine's Day chocolate promotion in their window. He called Kelly Bandstra and she agreed to sell Van

Veen Chocolates in her shop. That took the pressure off him to have a retail shop on the street. One thing led to another. Chuck didn't want to close Van Veen Chocolates until someone else was there and that gave Kelly the opportunity to pursue one of her own ideas.

"I've really had a lot of fun here," says Chuck. "I love my customers. But I'm enjoying sleeping in till 6 too."

"If we don't do it, someone else will - why not me?"

Kelly and Adam Bandstra are the owners of the Kitchen Hearth and Crystal Bath Shoppe. Kelly journals, and jots down ideas and what-ifs. The couple also made a business plan a few ago, and Kelly reread that after attending Mike Hovda's seminar earlier this year on "Making the Most of Your Recession." Hovda suggested, among many other things, taking advantage of - or creating - opportunities for success.

"If we don't do it, someone else will. Why not me?" Kelly asked. She is creating a To-Go business in the Van Veen Chocolates location. "I am trying to open in the next two weeks, so it won't be much other than Chuck's chocolates and coffee before Tulip Time," Kelly explained. But she is researching reusable/returnable/ degradable containers, foods without MSG, healthy but not necessarily 100% organic foods, etc. She is planning on offering boxed lunches and to-go breakfasts like muffins, cookies, espressos and coffee. She is happy with the coffee she sells at Kitchen Hearth, Coffee Master, so will continue that line at Van Veen's. "Coffee Master is only roasted a week before it's used, and is ground fresh," she says.

"We've got the painting and rearranging done," Kelly said. "There won't be any tables and chairs to begin with, though we might eventually have them. We need to perfect first other avenues that will sustain the business. It will grow. I've plenty of ideas, but I can only proceed one day at a time."

Hmmm, something tells me there might sooner or later be home-made Dutch letters at Van Veen Chocolates!

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