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Lake Oswego teen learns business in style

By **Nicole Dungca, The Oregonian**
October 06, 2009, 4:55PM



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NICOLE DUNGCA/THE OREGONIAN

Janice Aebi-Magee, 15, is the sole employee of her teen boutique, Aebi La Mode, and makes all merchandise decisions. The store is located on the bottom of her parent's Lake Oswego condominium.

LAKE OSWEGO -- Janice Aebi-Magee was an entrepreneur long before she even knew what the word meant.

In elementary school, she set up a flower stand to raise money for a friend's skateboard. A few summers later, she peddled her paintings outside her Lake Oswego home. And not long ago, she tried selling vegan doggie treats online -- even though her own dog wouldn't touch them.

So it struck John Aebi-Magee as no surprise when his daughter approached him last fall with an ambitious proposal: Could she open her own teen boutique?

To Janice's surprise, the "yes" came quickly. Now, after careful planning and parental investment, the 15-year-old is one of the youngest storefront owners in the Portland metro area.

Fueled by ambition

Every Tuesday through Friday at 3:30 p.m., Aebi-Magee opens the store located on the bottom floor of her parents' Lake Oswego condominium. Most days -- including Saturdays, when she's open from 1 to 5 p.m. -- can be slow, but the Lake Oswego High School sophomore doesn't mind. She usually does homework or surfs the Internet as she waits for customers until the store's 7 p.m. closing time.

Though she got monetary support from her parents, Aebi-Magee is proud to say that everything in the store -- from the clothing selection to the clothing racks to the soft pink- and green-striped walls -- was personally chosen by her.

"I was just there to make sure everything was legal," John Aebi-Magee said, referring to getting permits for the storefront. "Everything else is all her."

To anyone entering the store, the look is professional.

She'll be the first to admit that it's an unusual after-school job. As soon as Aebi-Magee told her friends, they hardly believed her.

"I was like, 'Are you serious?' because it sounded insane," said Franny Negreanu, 15.

"I didn't think she was actually going to do it," said Martha Lea, 15.

But when Aebi-Magee began to ask for suggestions about merchandise selection during study hall, they slowly realized the store wasn't just a pipe dream.

"I like to set goals for myself, and I always want to make sure I achieve them," Aebi-Magee said.

Aebi-Magee had to work long hours on a business plan, which she had to perfect in order to convince her father, a former business owner who helps consult other start-ups. After presenting her idea in the summer of 2008, she gave herself a tight deadline -- she wanted to open before the year's end.

Discount shopping

Starting Aebi La Mode was a gutsy move -- and not just because she's hardly old enough to drive.

Last December, Aebi La Mode opened its doors at a time when frugal consumers were leading the retail industry into one of the biggest slumps in

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Aebi La Mode

What: A teenage fashion boutique

Hours: 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays; 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays

Location: 560 2nd St., Lake Oswego

More information: aebilamode.com; 1-888-615-9001

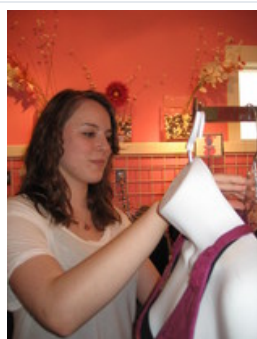
decades. Retail sales have only worsened since then, with the industry posting a five percent sales decrease in July.

New retail stores are rare because most new business owners are opting for Web start-ups, said Harry DeWolf, the district director of the Small Business Administration's Oregon chapter.

"As far as having a retail shop on a street with an address open to the public - for someone under 21, that would be pretty aggressive and pretty assertive," he said.

In the end, penny-pinching teenagers are helping her business stay alive. Aebi-Magee created the store with her friends in mind. Shopping in downtown Lake Oswego can be expensive for high schoolers, she said.

"I love to shop, and I realized that I don't shop here in Lake Oswego," she said. "It seemed like the perfect opportunity to sell cheap clothing that's also cute."



NICOLE
DUNGCA/THE
OREGONIAN

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Aebi-Magee marks every piece of clothing down from the company's suggested price -- this way, most of her merchandise already has a 10 to 20 percent discount, even before she puts it on sale.

The plan seems to be working. She makes a small profit every month, although she doesn't factor in rent or electric bills because of the store's location.

But the business venture is "not about making a maximum profit," she said. It's about helping friends find affordable clothes while learning about business at the same time.

She plans to study business when she goes to college in a few years, and is already delving into it in high school: She's taking her first Marketing course this fall.

Aebi-Magee takes on the store's future one day at a time. She still doesn't know if she wants to add employees or expand the company. And if

she goes to college out of state, she may not be able to keep it open.

But she seems to be sure of at least one thing.

"I'm going to pay my parents back for the store," she said, with a laugh. "They told me I don't need to, but I'm going to."

-- **Nicole Dungca**

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