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Port couple turns wish to be their own boss into a lucrative enterprise

The latest entry in the “buy local” campaign being promoted by Port Washington’s Sanfilippo Sentry is a tribute to the entrepreneurial spirit.

Bottles of an all-purpose cleaner called Diamond Finish, which is sold with a microfiber polishing cloth, recently appeared on the grocer’s shelves along with the growing number of other locally produced items.

The cleaner was developed by Port Washington residents Scott and Kathryn Burich in 2009 as an offshoot of a foray into the sale of a motorcycle cleaner.

It turns out Diamond Finish, which contains no ammonia or petroleum and is said to kill 99.5% of surface germs and bacteria, has myriad uses beyond keeping vintage Harley-Davidsons shining.

The couple says the solution is “ideal for cleaning glass, mirrors, musical instruments, stainless

steel and enamel appliances, tile, marble, granite, crystal, TV and computer screens, cell phones, plastic and clear-coat vehicle finishes."

As impressive as the claims of the cleaner are, the story of Sign of the Times that lies behind the small plastic bottle is just as impressive.

It is a familiar saga for those who dream of a better life.

"Our business was born simply out of personal frustration," Scott Burich said.

"Back in 2005, we were both unhappy at our current jobs. We didn't quite know what we wanted to do, but we knew for certain that we wanted to work for ourselves. We put our heads together and, after much discussion, we took money out of our savings and started Sign of the Times."

As motorcycle enthusiasts, the couple's initial focus was on customized T-shirts catering to female biker fans. The shirts were initially sold on eBay, until they realized it was cheaper to market their products on their own Web site — www.JackieBlueWear.com.

The Buriches continued to reinvest in the company and expanded their line of high-quality ladies shirts accented with customized glitter and flock. Eventually, they branched out into making small signs and banners.

"During all this, we both kept our full-time jobs and did the work for our business on nights and weekends, putting in about 100 hours a week," Scott Burich said.

In 2006, the couple began to focus on local vending options, selling items at Cedarburg Maxwell Street and Port Washington's Pirate Fest "and the ball started rolling," he said.

Before long, the couple was selling goods at events throughout Wisconsin and Illinois.

"We booked an event every weekend from Memorial Day to Labor Day for the next two years," Burich said.

By mid-2007, the couple decided they could quit their "day jobs" and focus on sales.

Little did they know their business would branch out again later that year, when the couple met a representative of the manufacturer of a motorcycle cleaner called BugSlide and became the national distributor.

From that point, they came to the painful realization that motorcycling and its related sales had seasonal appeal, at least in the Midwest.

The quest for a year-round cleaner began, and Diamond Finish was developed.

“Its unique properties allow it to actually repel dust, dirt and fingerprints,” Burich said.

While gaining considerable visibility at local retail outlets, the Buriches will also market the cleaner at the Milwaukee Home and Garden Show and Wisconsin State Fair next year.

In addition to the Port Sentry store, the cleaner is sold at Drew’s True Value, Lakeshore Kitchen and Stevlin’s Do It Best Hardware in Port Washington, Ozaukee Ace in Grafton and at all Colder’s stores in southeast Wisconsin.

Demonstrations of the product will be given at the Sanfilippo Sentry Holiday Open House on Dec. 17.