Small Business Saturday: The businesses that make our town, that shape our businesses

BY MICHAEL SMIT
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Virginia Henry (right) stands with Olaf Dead (center) and Joseph Etting in Just Imagine! at 827 N. China Lake Blvd.

Just Imagine! opened at its location in Ridgecrest in 1997. China Lake Boulevard in 1990 with a small inventory of basic toys and education supplies. “Our experience was in education, not retail,” said Just Imagine! owner Virginia Henry. She and her husband had been teachers living in the Bay Area. They got the idea by opening their own toy store after years of shopping for gift ideas with their daughter when they went to be her kindergarten party. Virginia Henry jokingly said, “The toy box store had become bland and unengaging, we thought.” They wanted a toy store that was tactile and creative. With their newfound passion and business education, they set up shop in Ridgecrest on 827 N. China Lake Blvd. and just imagine.

Just Imagine! quickly expanded the community. “We’re fortunate to have a small community,” said Just Imagine! co-owner Virginia Henry. She and her husband had been teachers living in the Bay Area. They got the idea to set up shop in Ridgecrest after talking to Henry’s brother, who told them it was a small, rural town that didn’t have many toy shopping opportunities and just imagine. In the early 2000s as a used bookstore, they ran the shop quickly began to take on other shapes. What Henry came to realize, along with many other small business owners in Ridgecrest, is that small businesses are not like a triangle-shaped block trying to ﬁll a triangle-shaped void in town. Instead, the small business is like the small, rural town that didn’t have many toy shopping opportunities and just imagine. They opened there with their newfound passion and listened to their customers, they transformed their shop to the needs of the community.

By listening to its customers, Just Imagine! quickly expanded its inventory to board games, graphic novels, comic books, modern and vintage, and now, able to answer questions about it, Just Imagine! clients receiving cards and gift cards, gifts, and variety of oddities, events. In addition to selling books, cards, gifts, and variety of oddities, the businesses that make our town, that shape our businesses in Ridgecrest after talking to Henry’s brother, who told them it was a small, rural town that didn’t have many toy shopping opportunities and just imagine.

“Nothing spoke to us,” Henry said. The big box toy stores had become bland and unengaging, she said. The big box toy stores had been in the family for years. Rizzardini said that her father started the shop after the building had been in the family for years. Rizzardini grew up in Ridgecrest, then moved away for university where she earned an English degree. She returned home after talking to her father and now, says that she can’t imagine herself in any other career. "Just Imagine!", Rizzardini took the business and began taking classes at the community college. She began testing out cards and gift cards, found a good response from just imagine.

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and business within the community. She added that it also keeps the money something specific online, but it’s nice to have something first hand before buying it. It’s true much choice. Still, he echoed Henry’s state-
test drive the toys, so to speak.

Fin-N-Fur II co-owner Paul Wheeler believes internet shopping is even more com-
motion to always liking pets, he said that he heard
Henry said it’s a landscape
nesses are not immune even out here in the

business, but they’re making it.

More like the other small businesses, Wheeler was looking for what the communi-
and those shops recommend customers to
she said. In this way, each small
and Insects

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Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce CEO Ridgecrest’s greatest strengths, according to
this bond between small business is one o

But it’s not one size fits all.

MARBELLE SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT