

RD sets sight on Lewiston; prides itself on customer satisfaction

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 "We restored a barn that was built in the late-1800s," Rani said. "It was a ski shop and then a bunch of other things over time. A quilt shop. He worked there in high school."
 "It was called The Ski Rack, and it was kind of like the place for ski equipment back in those days," Dennis said. "I loved working there when I was a kid. That's what kind of drew us to that building."
 "So, we brought it back to life, and put clothing, gifts, candles – all that sort of thing in there – in 2012. And then we did a couple sunshine + bluebirds stores, which are like more gift and accessory, less clothing. Similar product mix, smaller footprint – our sunshine + bluebirds store. More gift-oriented and less apparel."
 Rani said, "Lewiston has always been on our mind, because I grew up here. He grew up in the Southtowns; we did Orchard Park first,



Jewelry, clothing, gifts and even a mural (courtesy of artist Jocelyn Conaway) can be seen inside the new Research and Design store in Lewiston.

and then kind of knew we would circle back to this."
 Dennis added, "Rani and I both were planning on different career paths, and we met each other in retail, and ended up moving up in the company we worked for. We ended up being president and CEO of a retail company in the Northtowns. We had a very nice run there."
 The RD concept is simple: While there are many places to shop, "We both love to travel and then go to all the trade shows and scout out all the fashion, upcoming gifts and things, all the trends that are happening," Rani said. "And a lot of people, what they like about us, is when they buy something, they usually get a compliment or, 'Where'd you get that?' And you get word-of-mouth referral."
 "We edit the best of the best. We do our research, and then design either your wardrobe, your footwear wardrobe, your baby gifts – you know, the whole situation. And

then if we expand down the road, it could be into other categories."
 "And I'm Rani – R – and he's Dennis – D – so, RD."
 Dennis added, "Everybody, for 15 years while we built this business, knew Rani and Dennis. So, I'm like, we kind of should just go with it – be Research and Design – but kind of like put it out there that we're Rani and Dennis – this is us."
 Once customers get past the aesthetic jolt, they'll find "It's a community store," Rani said. "So, you might get a grandmother who

comes in and she's buying for the babies, and then she says, 'And I'm going to send my daughter, and my granddaughter is going to come with her.' Especially around the holidays, you have generational shopping."
 "Over time, because we have so much experience, we edit the product mix to cater to everyone. We kind of get a groove of what people are looking for – and especially like in communities for gifting. A lot of people come for gifts. Many people come for fashion clothes, but most people come for gifts. Husbands, around the holidays, they'll just hold up their phone, look on Facebook or Instagram, 'I'll take this.'"
 Dennis said, "We've been at it for 25 years. We have a good idea of what people want."
 He explained, "A lot of people will buy things online, but people

don't generally buy gifts online. When they buy gifts for people, they go somewhere to get them. So, it's good way to get people into the store."
 "The thing I noticed from the beginning with our business is people coming in to buy gifts for somebody and getting distracted and buying themselves something," he said. "There's been times where I've seen people come in, they're like, 'I need a gift.' They look around, they buy something, they leave. And they come back and they're like, 'Oh, I forgot about you.'"
 Popular brands include Sorel, Nordic Beach, townie, MOTHER Denim and RD's own sunshine + bluebirds jewelry, clutches and scarves. Items are boxed and gift-wrapped, and there is no return time limit.
 Prices are "mid to high-end," she

said. "We have entry-level price points, because we want to have something for everyone. We're in the Nordstrom to Bloomingdale's price range. But we also have like just quick pick-me-up things. So, we kind of do a little bit of high low."
 He noted, "I would say that probably a better way to describe what our mix is, is we do the homework for the consumer. If we have an item in here that's a little bit more expensive, we believe it's worth paying the price for the more expensive item. We're really value-oriented."
 She said, "I'll look at high fashion, and then we just translate that into something that everyone can buy."
 Rani acknowledged Lewiston is already home to a handful of clothing stores, but said, "We're totally

supportive of any boutiques. We think the more shopping and the more community, the better."
 "When we go to other cities that have awesome towns and villages, it's like a collection of restaurants and bars and things to do. And we see that in the Hamptons – we had a pop-up shop in the Hamptons. You create a community, and then people from all over come to that, and they hit up everyone."
 He said, "We consider online our competitors – not other stores. We want to help them. Online is the true foe of brick and mortar. You want people to say, 'Should I click this button, or should I go there and have a great experience?'"
 She said, "I think that's where we end up busiest is like mothers and daughters or friends want to meet for coffee and then go shopping. It's that experience – that's

the connection."
 Mayor Anne Welch said, "It is my pleasure to welcome RD – Research and Design – to the Village of Lewiston. The new owners, Rani and Dennis Salemi, have transformed the former bank into a beautiful retail establishment offering a selection of top fashion brands, accessories and gifts. They also have another shop in Orchard Park and have years of retail business experience, so I know RD – Research and Design – will be very successful in Lewiston. This shop is truly an asset to our village, and it is sure to be a draw for visitors and residents alike."
 Research and Design is located at 721 Center St. For more information, call 405-7090 or visit www.researchanddesign.com or <https://www.sunshineandbluebirds.com/>.

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Stella swim team wins

The Stella Niagara swim team is back in the pool at long last, with multiple meets under their belts for the 2021 Neumann Catholic Swim League season.
 The SNEP North Stars are 2-0 with wins against Christ the King/St.

Mary's of Lancaster, and St. Benedict's. Stella Niagara swimmers took home wins in all three age groups at their meet at Buffalo State College and are looking forward to swimming against St. Gregory's on Oct. 17.
 This year is particularly special, not only because COVID-19 caused the 2020 season to be canceled, but because Stella Niagara has welcomed St. Peter's R.C. School swimmers to the team for this season.
 A press release noted, "Stella Niagara Education Park and St. Peter's R.C. School enjoy working together so as many Catholic school students as possible have the opportunity to compete."
 "More than 20 swimmers have achieved all-star times already, and the North Stars are looking forward to an eventful season. (Submitted photo)

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