

CANINE intervention

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75 cents

local FLAIR

Area products hit chain stores

Inside Greenwood's Rural King store, shoppers can find everything from blue jeans to mechanical supplies to baby chicks.

National brands such as Carhardt, Stihl and Husqvarna are prominent.

But near the front of the store, just to the left of the display of potting soil and seed spreaders, is a collection of Martinsville-based products. The soy-based candles, bath bombs and other Twisted Wick Candle Co. items have a permanent place among the other retail giants.

"People are really gearing towards shopping locally. They're getting back to that. It's really benefiting the consumer to feature our products and the other local products," said Jodi Scheve, co-founder of Twisted Wick

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Clockwise from top: Rich Scheve of Twisted Wick Candle Co. checks his messages while restocking his display of candles, soaps, bath bombs and lotions on March 30 at the Rural King. // Candles are among the items Twisted Wick Candle Co. sells at the Greenwood Rural King. // Homemade soaps for sale at the Greenwood Rural King made by Twisted Wick Candle Co.

LOCAL

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with her husband, Rich. "It's nice that (Rural King) realizes that's important."

While national retailers still rely heavily on major brands for the majority of its stock, stores also are carving out space for local companies such as Twisted Wick to sell their goods.

The relationship have proven beneficial to both sides, as small vendors get greater exposure and retailers forge stronger connections with the communities their customers come from.

"We wanted to find local people to support, people who shopped with us, who knew our store. We wanted items that our customers had, so that we could help them and help ourselves also," said Ginny Clayton, manager at the Martinsville Rural King who helped facilitate Twisted Wick into the stores.

The focus on localization is evident as soon as shoppers walk into Franklin's Kroger store.

In the produce section, customers can buy mint, rosemary and basil from Heartland Growers out of Westfield.

Special displays offer sauces from Jen's Country Kitchen from Lapel, Crazy Charlie's Salsa out of Fishers and jars from Brendle Honey Farm in Indianapolis.

People can find Indianapolis-based Skinny Co. body butter in the health and beauty aisles.

Since the start of the year, the Kroger in Franklin has been featuring creams, lotions and other handmade items from Shelbyville's Bass Farms.

The company was founded by Whiteland native Jana Bass, and her products are featured in local businesses throughout the area.

Kroger is her first large chain retailer, she said. The company approached Bass after



SCOTT ROBERSON | DAILY JOURNAL

Above: Bath bombs and soap bags are popular Twisted Wick Candle Co. products available at the Greenwood Rural King. Left: Rich Scheve, owner of Twisted Wick Candle Co., restocks his display of candles, soaps, bath bombs and lotions.

one of their Indianapolis-area executives used some of her Triple B Hydrating cream.

Discussions between the two sides resulted in Bass Farms getting a prominent display in stores in Franklin and Fishers, with plans to sell out of 10 central Indiana stores.

"We agreed to do six at first, and then they came back to ask if I thought I could do 10," Bass said. "I'm trying to keep Kroger's stock different, with products that you can't get other places."

Kroger representatives have not only given Bass Farms more exposure and access to more customers, but they've guided her through the sometimes confusing and technical requirements.

For example, in order to be a vendor with the store, Bass would need a distribution company that handled her products. The store helped her husband, Brad Bass, become her distributor.

"They're helping me figure everything out and supporting me through this," Bass said. "They've been great to work with."

In 2015, Kroger started partnering with the

Indiana Grown campaign, which was developed by the state Department of Agriculture to promote Hoosier-produced products.

Kroger stores started featuring prominent Indiana Grown displays in stores throughout the state.

A similar emphasis was put in place by Rural King, Clayton said.

"Our corporate office challenged all of the stores to find some local vendors," she said. "So we, as managers, started shopping for what we'd want to sell in our store."

Rural King features local companies such as Hunter's Honey Farm from Martinsville and Dillman Farms out of Bloomington in prominent spots within the store.

Clayton discovered Twisted Wick after seeing the display at the Indianapolis Home Show in January. She approached the Scheves, and after learning more about their products, offered to work with them featuring candles, soaps and lotions in certain central Indiana stores.

The initial success of their sales quickly

motivated Rural King to expand the partnership, with Twisted Wick now available in Greenwood, Martinsville, Bedford, Columbus, Kokomo and Bloomington.

"I had been looking for some soaps, because I thought that would be a niche for us. I felt like it was something we were missing," Clayton said. "We tried it, and it's been amazing. We've put it in most of our entire district."

Twisted Wick has had limited wholesale opportunities in the past. Though they do have a shop in Nashville, almost all of their sales come over the internet and trade shows.

The Rural King opportunity gives them another outlet.

"We're being introduced as a product line to a bunch of people who may have never heard of us before," said Rich Scheve, co-founder of Twisted Wick. "When you think intuitively, 'Where does Twisted Wick fit in the market?' Rural King might not be the first place to come to mind. But it really seems to fit in perfect."

The Scheves had investigated how to get their products in larger retail stores for many years, but always found the terms and conditions of these arrangements to be too one-sided. They had to make a commitment in terms of amount of product and length of the relationship that seemed to much of a risk for a small company.

Rural King was different, Rich Scheve said.

"They gave us full creative rights on our display. Here was the display, all we had to do was fill it up and do what we wanted," he said.

Twisted Wick created all of their own signage, with some sheets featuring descriptions of the various products and how their items are made. They could pick what they wanted to feature on the stand, and how diverse to make the offerings.

"They really, truly desire getting local products in. That means a lot to us, because they recognize the quality that we provide and the ability for it to be a mutually beneficial situation," Rich Scheve said.