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TOP STORY

Family breathes new life into landmark gas station

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Sep 29, 2021



Ironsides Estate Settlement, at the former Hales Corner Mobil station on East Main Street, is now owned and operated by Steve Sharp, Steve Martinko and Serena Melton. It is open on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment.

Steve Sharp

A vacant former Mobil service station, dating to 1970, sat on the east end of downtown Watertown just waiting for the perfect business owners to happen by and inject it with new life.

They did.

Exit hard-working, popular, retiring auto mechanic and former station owner Jeff Hale in the spring of 2019; enter antiques and collectibles entrepreneurs Jason Martinko, his fiancé Nisa Melton and her daughter, Serena Melton, who purchased the station that same year.

With the timely combination, you had a match made in architectural preservation — and vintage sales — heaven.

“We’ve been living in Watertown for nine years now and our estate-selling was based out of our home,” Jason said as he and his future family worked inside their new store, Ironsides Estate Settlement, one recent, sunny fall afternoon. “When we saw that Jeff Hale was in the process of selling his station, we thought this would be the perfect spot and the station would be the perfect vintage ‘look’ that we have been looking for. I mean, dealing with antiques and vintage stuff, what could be better than selling out of a vintage Mobil station?”

Nisa, 46, and Serena, 26, hail from North Carolina. Jason, 47, has lived all over the United States, from New York to Montana and Mississippi to, now, the Badger State.

After purchasing the once-bustling station at 820 E. Main St., the three have been working to update the facility, and move items for sale in from their home and basement.

They love their new digs.

“There’s a good feel to the building and the area,” said Jason, who has been dealing in vintage items for the past nine years. “It’s a great location on East Main Street and everyone knows where it is. The building has been a staple in Watertown for decades.”

The new owners did all the remodeling.

“From paint and a new ceiling, to the hardwood floor in the office, and taking the two small bathrooms and making them into one small bathroom, (we did it),” Jason said.

He emphasized that Ironsides is an “estate settlement” business and does not conduct estate sales.

“We don’t handle estate sales, because they entail a ton of work and loads of people going through a customer’s home,” he said. “We think that it’s a better customer/family benefit for us to clear everything out and remove it from the premises. We occasionally handle a clean-out for a family or customer. We think this provides a more private and sensitive option for a family that is dealing with a loved one’s estate.”

Jason said he and his Ironsides partners enjoy working on liquidating estates, in part, because they get to meet many different types of interesting people.

“There are all sorts of characters involved in the antiques and vintage trade,” he said.

“There’s so much history and you’ll never stop learning.”

The Ironsides trio takes personal interest in the items they choose to sell.

“We don’t handle consignments or run an antique mall,” Jason said. “Everything in the store is something we thought was interesting, funny, historical, educational, useful or enjoyable to view.”

The transition of the old Mobil facility from a well-used, classic service station to an antiques and collectibles shop had Watertown Mayor Emily McFarland pleased this week.

“I haven’t had the opportunity to meet the new business owners yet,” McFarland said, “but, it’s always exciting to see businesses get creative with their space. We welcome Ironsides to the Main Street business community and are here to support them in whatever way we can.”

Ironsides is open Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment.

“If people can’t make it in on a Saturday, or just want the place to themselves,” Jason said, “we will, generally, be happy to make that happen.”

Steve Sharp