

# New owners dive in to drive-in

BY KAREN BONAR  
Ellsworth County I-R

KANOPOLIS — As the smell of popcorn wafted through the air, Kylee and Courtney Maddox waited their turn in the concession line at the Kanopolis Drive-In.

As the sisters waited for snacks June 20, they exclaimed about the updates to the stand. The floors. The counter. The decor.

“It was just so different. It was well-put together. Everything was new,” Kylee said. “I loved that the concession stand was in one door, out the other. Everything was thought of.”

The pair worked at the drive-in concession stand last summer.

“I love that the bathrooms are not connected to the concession stand,” Kylee said. “It was always confusing trying to tell who was in the bathroom line and who was in the concession line. The bathroom lines were always really long.”

These improvements are exactly what owners Tyson Moyer and his wife, Jessica Eagle-Moyer, hoped to achieve.

“It’s been trial and error for us to figure out how we are navigating the business,” Jessica said as she assembled the newly-purchased cotton candy machine before the Friday night show.



Photos by KAREN BONAR/Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter

The new 24-by-14 addition to the Kanopolis Drive-In concession stand is attached to the original concession stand. The addition features new restrooms with exterior entrances.

The duo purchased the business from previous owners, Josh and Amanda Webb, in the fall. They hoped to build on the previous success of the drive-in.

Once they owned it, Jessica said they knew improvement and expansion was on the horizon. She said they attended the annual United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association Convention in Florida in January.

“It was a very big moment for us education wise to learn a lot more about the drive-in movie industry,” she said. “I don’t think people realize how many moving parts there are to a drive-in.”

Very quickly, the new owners realized a new 2-inch water line would be key to adding a 24-by-14 addition.

“The first step was emptying out the concession stand,” Jessica said. “We knew there needed

to be an infrastructure overhaul to bring things up-to-date.

“Opening walls, we realized we had to upgrade the electric, plumbing, add insulation.” Improving the quality of the experience was important.

“Customers said over and over ‘concessions take too long,’” Jessica said. “We set out to fix it. Getting people in and out quickly. That is how we ended up with the style of concession we did.”

Visitors enter on the north side, work their way along the concession counter, pay and exit on the south side of the building. Bathrooms are accessed from the parking lot rather than directly through the concession stand waiting space.

“We knew it had to be one entrance in, one exit out,” Jessica said. “We were pushed to the brink last weekend — we were



Kylee and Courtney Maddox go through the concession line. The sisters worked at the concession stand in 2024.

sold out on Saturday (June 14) — that happening helps us see our concession is very efficient now. We can handle quite a bit, getting people taken care of.”

Even when the drive-in, which can comfortably fit about 160 cars, sells out, Jessica said walk-ins are welcome.

“People can bring their lawn chairs, sit in the

grass,” she said.

While the concession stand is new — and expanded — it was important to the owners to maintain the nostalgia of the Kanopolis Drive-In.

On the walls is a mixture of the old and new. The current week’s movie posters are prominently

visible, as are photos of the original owner, Tony Blazina, who built the facility in 1952.

“Tony is on the wall, looking at the screen. We have honored him and his family,” Jessica said. “The (Blazina) family has memorabilia they will donate to the drive-in. We are excited to get it from them.”

Also familiar is the wall of licence plates, a touch added by previous owner Josh Webb.

One of the new additions to the concession stand is the popcorn machine. Jessica said the retro 1960s machine took up valuable counter space.

“The other was harder to clean. It didn’t produce as quickly as this machine,” she said. “We decided to implement a new popcorn machine with an automated oil dispenser. It’s a little safer for the kids when they’re doing popcorn. It keeps the popcorn fresher. Now we can keep popcorn moving.”

A classic popcorn warmer was also purchased from a drive-in that closed.

While the familiar machine from the ’60s isn’t in use at the moment, it is still part of the drive-in’s legacy.

“We will put that in another spot in the drive-in facilities,” Jessica said. “We are excited to repurpose some of the vintage items.”

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## Ellsworth police chief resigns

BY ALAN RUSCH  
Ellsworth County I-R

The resignation of Ellsworth Police Chief Jerry Penny was accepted by the Ellsworth City Council Monday.

Penny sent a letter of resignation to Interim City Manager Allen J. Dinkel June 18. It becomes effective two weeks from that date.

“I have received an opportunity to be closer to my kids and future grandkids, and I feel that I need to take it,” Penny wrote in the letter. “I appreciate the opportunities I had during my time at the Ellsworth Police Department.”

After they approved the resignation, Dinkel said it was a good time to discuss the police department and how to proceed in the future.

“Even though I am very supportive of having a police department in a city of this size, there are others who feel there may be other options,” he said, noting he has

“Naturally, there have been public concerns in the past couple of years regarding the police department. This is an opportunity to move ahead in a positive manner.”

Allen J. Dinkel  
Interim Ellsworth City Manager

had two council members reach out to him wanting to discuss how to move forward.

“Naturally, there have been public concerns in the past couple of years regarding the police department,” Dinkel said. “This is an opportunity to move ahead in a positive manner.”

One option would be dissolving the police

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## Sculptor runs rural business

BY CATHERINE DOUD  
Ellsworth County I-R

LORRAINE — The small town of Lorraine — last census population count 137 — might be the last place you’d expect to see a life-sized tribute sculpture featuring country music legend Johnny Cash or a cigar store Indian made entirely out of reclaimed metal. But this small town in south-central Ellsworth County has all that and many more surprises in store, all tucked in and outside Liberty Trades, a business located at 304 Wichita Ave., and owned by Rocky Driggs.

The building has an old-time country store vibe from the street — a place you could sit and rock on a chair on the porch a while. It’s punctuated with antiques for sale and, of course, with larger-than-life-sized sculptures, all crafted by Driggs. Once you step inside, you’ll find a variety of items for sale, as well as sculptures in various degrees of completion, and of course, the artist, buyer, seller and

retired welder, Driggs.

“I wanted to get off the road. I was a welder for about 23 years, and it just got hectic on the road, which isn’t good for having a family or even a wife,” he said. “I like buying and selling, and that all started in 2012. I began to get the hang of visiting flea markets and picking up items. I sold on eBay. Before that, I had a shop in Smith Center. I’ve probably been in Lorraine for three years.”

“When I left the road, I got remarried and she lived in Holyrood, then we saw this shop here, because I was taking over the yard pretty fiercely. It wasn’t good, so we got this shop, and then the house down the street came up for sale, so we just moved here.”

“I knew I could sell things for a good price. That’s the No. 1 key: If you want to have a business in a small town, you have to offer good prices so they keep coming back.”

Timing was the key in more than one way, as he started buying and selling with clock parts.



CATHERINE DOUD/Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter

Rocky Driggs in front of Liberty Trades in downtown Lorraine, where his tribute to Johnny Cash and a cigar store-style Indian lead the way into the store.

“That’s what started me on eBay — selling clock parts. I moved on from there,” he said.

While he engages in a lot of buying and selling on eBay and Facebook Marketplace to reach larger markets beyond his rural community, he also

keeps his storefront open for sales and occasionally hosts significant sales events.

“I just had a big ol’ sale recently, so I just got rid of a lot of good stuff,” he said. “A lot of people

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Ross Janssen’s  
Weather

June 25-July 1

WEDNESDAY 91/73  
Partly cloudy

THURSDAY 92/74  
Isolated storms

FRIDAY 92/72  
Partly cloudy

SATURDAY 90/70  
Scattered storms

SUNDAY 91/72  
Overnight storms

MONDAY 84/70  
Mostly cloudy

TUESDAY 82/68  
Partly cloudy

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