

# From balloons to riches

By KARI WEEKS

Reporter

The stuffed animals, stationery, containers and varieties of gift items at The Rainbow Store are like the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow — just not as expensive.

Though the store appeals to shoppers age 2 and up, college students especially are attracted to the store.

It has color, cheer, variety and reasonable prices. It also has two personable owners, Bill and Lexa Wetterman.

From the design and construction of the store, to the purchase and sale of the items, the Wettermans carefully have built a business that's more than just a store. It's a fun place to go.

The store's bi-level interior, bright colors and interesting gift items often cause children to come running into the store, Lexa says.

The Wettermans, both 23 and seniors at Texas A&M, started their business two years ago. It began as a little business booth at one end of Post Oak that primarily sold balloons. Then they moved to the center of the mall and added a few more items to

their inventory. And now the business has grown into The Rainbow Store.

The Wettermans started the business about two months before they got married as a way to provide an income while they finished school.

"We wanted to do more than work for minimum wage," says Lexa, a building construction major. "We didn't want to be like anyone else. We look for things that are colorful and unique to sell."

Money for the investment came from savings earned from their reconstructing a burned house in Waco, and from a small loan, says Bill, an environmental design and building construction major.

It only took three weeks to get the business together, he says, but now they spend about 16 hours a day working on the business.

Some banks did not take the Wettermans seriously when they wanted to borrow money to open the store, Bill says, and neither did the mall when the Wettermans first started two years ago.

The management at the mall probably just thought the store

wouldn't do too well Bill says. Although he says the mall has been good to them.

Creating the business has been a learning experience for the Wettermans.

"We've been able to use some of the skills we have learned in school," Bill says. "We have learned more from the business than we would have, had we just been in school."

They also have learned how to anticipate their market, she says. Most of the store's customers are women, except during certain seasons when men need gifts, Lexa says.

Bill says even though they watch the market, the store does not really have any specific competition. The store competes with other stores in specific areas, such as stuffed animals or stationery, he says, but no other store in this area carries the variety of items their store does.

The Wettermans are not sure where they will go from here. Right now The Rainbow Store might not be their pot of gold ... but once they get the bank loan paid, they can work to expand, or create something new.



Photo by MIKE DAVIS

This store originally was a balloon store, but has grown to reach new heights.

## Big, tall men clothed here

By KIMBERLEE NORRIS

Reporter

Everything is bigger in Texas, including the men, and someone has got to clothe those big boys.

Dave Schulze, manager and part owner of Marvin John's Big and Tall Shop in Post Oak Mall, dresses many of the big and tall men in the Bryan-College Station area.

Not just big clothes, mind you, but "name brand clothing for men of exceptional stature." Schulze sells suits, sportcoats, shoes, ties, shorts, swim suits, dress and sport shirts and much more.

"I have everything to clothe a big or tall man," he boasts.

How big?

"Up to size 15 in boots and shoes, and up to 62 inches in the waist of suits, slacks and shorts," Schulze says. "Pretty big, huh?"

Before opening Marvin John's nearly a year ago, Schulze managed Desmond's in Post Oak Mall, where he was continually asked for larger or longer sizes not generally carried by department stores.

"I checked it out, and found out there was no place in the College Station area that sold clothing to fit larger men," he said. "The closest shop was in Houston."

With the financial help of his parents, Schulze opened his shop in what he considers

the prime location.

"If you're going to open a store, open in the mall or not at all," he advises. "That's where people shop today."

Schulze's shop is doing well — growing from a mailing list of 200 regular customers to 950 in the past eight months. He says his clientele are big men of all ages, but primarily over 25, who are interested in a larger variety of clothing choices.

"In the past, clothing manufacturers offered three colors to the bigger man: white, off-white and light blue. There was a prevalent idea that plaids or stripes made big men look too big, so big men's fashions were severely limited," he said. "I offer plaids, stripes, and colors never available before, like pastel pink, burgandy, and purple."

Schulze says the big sellers this spring are "Magnum P.I." Hawaiian prints and western styled shirts and suits. Cotton is in.

"Put that polyester on big men, and they melt," he said. "The more cotton the better, for a bigger guy."

Schulze sells a lot of clothing to woman shopping for husbands and boyfriends, so he offers a relaxed return policy.

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