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LOCAL BUSINESS
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But explore a little more, and it's clear this is a working truck stop, from the laundry and shower area to the truckers' lounge in the hall that connects the store with the Feed Mill Restaurant. After all, the whole Waspy's concept started from a basic need rooted in the farm.

"When you're hauling livestock in western Iowa, it's hard to find a truck wash," said Brian Handlos, whose family owns and operates Waspy's, which has locations in Audubon and Templeton. "We decided this would be a service we could provide."

It turned out that one good idea planted the seed for a whole new crop of businesses, including a \$7 million, full-service truck stop in Templeton on 6.3 acres near the junction of Highway 141 and Highway 71. The convenience store, car wash and fuel stations opened in May 2017. The opportunity was too good to pass up, since 5,000 vehicles pass by on Highway 141 daily, according to Waspy's website.

The 16-acre Audubon complex represents an \$18 million investment in the local economy, thanks to the 24/7 convenience store/truck stop that opened August 24, 2018; the restaurant/bar that opened September 4, 2018; and the 36-room Blue Grass Inn & Suites hotel with an indoor pool that opened August 1, 2018. A 40,000-square-foot truck service station is slated to open at the Audubon Waspy's this spring to provide tire repair, truck wash-out services and more.

"We tried to think of everything," said Beth Handlos, who runs the business with her brother and their parents, Lawrence "Waspy" Handlos and his wife, Doris. "These businesses all feed off each other, and the potential here is incredible."

Growing opportunities in rural Iowa

To say that Waspy's is not the typical truck stop is an understatement. Yet it's as homegrown as the business's namesake. Now in his early 80s, Lawrence Handlos grew up on a farm near Willey, Iowa. He got the nickname "Waspy" from his father, John, a German immigrant who settled in the Carroll area.

"He gave Lawrence that nickname as a child, because it's tied to another German name that his father liked, Sebastian," Beth Handlos said. "Waspy" stuck with Lawrence ever since, and now it's a memorable brand name for our family's truck stops."

The name isn't the only memorable thing about Waspy's, which is redefining the truck stop/convenience store experience with these 10 business practices:

1. Put the customer first.

Being locally owned and family owned means paying extra attention the little things, from greeting customers by name at the convenience store to making sure the hotel rooms are extra clean — just the way Doris Handlos would want it.

"We say it's not just clean—it's Doris clean," Beth Handlos said.

2. Follow servant leadership.

The Handlos family emphasizes that their employees don't work for them; they work with them.

"It's a team effort," Beth Handlos said. "It's certainly not below us to bus the tables at the restaurant."

3. Give back to the community.

Along with creating nearly 100 new jobs in the Audubon/Templeton area, Waspy's creates community hubs where people of all ages can gather together.

"We're humbled to be part of people's lives every day," said Beth Handlos, who noted there are no outside investors in Waspy's.

4. Focus on local.

Like many rural Iowa towns, Audubon once had a thriving business district filled with motels, a jewelry store and more.

"For years, however, I watched Audubon slowly dwindle," said Beth Handlos, who grew up on a farm and graduated from Audubon High School in 1982.

When the Handlos family built their Waspy's truck stops, 75 percent of the contractors were located within 30 miles of the local community.

"It's exciting to see how dollars spent at Waspy's are being reinvested in our local communities to spur more economic development," Beth Handlos added.

5. Learn from success.

While making mistakes goes along with any new business, the Handlos family has worked hard to shorten their learning curve.

"We look to lots of different businesses to see what's working and what's not," said Beth Handlos, a former program coordinator with Iowa State University Athletics' marketing department. "We borrow good ideas anywhere we can find them."

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