

Blue House Books: A community favorite!



Sam Jacquest started her business by hosting pop-up events in the community and soon [Blue House Books](#) was housed in its own location in Kenosha.

THE BEGINNING

In 2017, Sam began her business hosting pop-up shops at community events and Kenosha Creative Space's 624 Gallery. Her sister and other family members chipped in to help make these events a success. The Kenosha Creative Space's mission is to enrich the creative economy in Kenosha and surrounding areas, and this little bookstore certainly did. The store is named after Sam's childhood home, which her nephew used to call "The Blue House." Sam said her home was the place where friends and family gathered and everyone felt welcome. She wanted to create a store with the same atmosphere.

THE RESOURCES

She came to the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at UW-Parkside for help. Jim McPhaul, the SBDC consultant Sam partnered with, helped her create a business plan. "Jim was so important to me! I walked in as this 25-year-old girl who didn't know what she didn't know. However, Jim took me seriously and gave me lots of valuable advise," Sam said. She also received important start-up recommendations from WWBIC, the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation.

THE PANDEMIC

In early 2020 when the COVID pandemic hit, Blue House Books transitioned into a pickup and delivery service. When the lockdown occurred, people were struggling to deal with being at home and were seeking books, puzzles, and other activities to keep themselves and their kids entertained. Sam was soon receiving requests for a dozen deliveries per day.

Because Sam was able to keep her business running during the pandemic, she was able to open her first full brick-and-mortar location in September 2020, utilizing a space in the Kenosha Creative Space building that was less than 1,000 square feet.

"Kenosha had a bug push to support local businesses during the COVID pandemic, and I definitely



saw that support from our customers," Sam said. Blue House Books was also a recipient of the We're All In Grant offered to Wisconsin small businesses by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

THE GROWTH

Only one short year later, in September 2021, the unique shop outgrew its space and moved to an even bigger location on 6th Avenue. Sam credits her staff for some of the store's wonderful success. "Every member of the staff loves to read and is a community supporter. They truly love helping people find the books that they need. Our store is all about the customer experience," she said.

The staff started off consisting of just Sam. In January 2021, one customer who loved the store wanted to volunteer to help. She was hired instead and is now training to become a manager. Another interested community member approached Sam to help at the store and she is now working as the event coordinator. Blue House Books offers lots of fun events not provided by big box bookstores, such as book launches for independent authors and tarot card readings.

Sam is excited about the future! She hopes to add a café and coffee shop soon. And in a decade or so, she hopes to also become a publishing house. For now, though, she is happy to be a community center as well as a book seller. "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for the Kenosha community members," she said. "We love when people tell us they feel comfortable and welcome in the store."



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