



Lois Thurston (left) and Gary Higgins operate Affordable Furniture and Treasures in Dubuque. It offers new and slightly used items to decorate a home.

# Affordability grabs a seat

Affordable Furniture and Treasures offers items so you can change the look of your home

BY SHERRI EDWARDS • PHOTOS BY EILEEN MESLAR

A search for the right cherry nightstand led Linda Culbertson to Affordable Furniture and Treasures in Dubuque. Now she is a long-term customer who always finds something special at this unique and locally owned furniture store.

Culbertson and her husband had moved into a condo.

"Naturally, our furniture didn't work exactly as it did in our old home," she said. "At my first visit to the store, I met Lois and Gary. We hit off right away ... and I was thrilled with all the good-looking furniture they had to offer."



Gary Higgins is Affordable Furniture's owner, and his store specializes in new and slightly used furniture plus home accessories. As the main purchaser, too, Higgins acquires inventory from estates and liquidation sales. His goal is to keep cost reasonable and quality high for his customers.

"(There are) prices and styles for every budget and some very nice antique pieces, too," Culbertson said. "I'm especially attracted to round tables, something different, sometimes vintage. They had a nice-looking curio cabinet that I use for an entry table."

Unusual furniture not available elsewhere is what Affordable Furniture aims to offer. The business' path from concept to store-front happened quickly.

Higgins had spent most of his professional life in farming and residential construction work. After meeting Lois Thurston, now his fiancé, he moved from Independence, Iowa, to Dubuque. She sparked the idea for the business.

The couple were holding a garage sale at Thurston's mother's home. Higgins said, "Seeing Lois in action cleaning and restoring furniture ... (and noting) her ability not only to sell items, but actually get connected with the customer, really inspired me."

So, in 2017, Higgins started selling furniture out of his home. It wasn't a tiny operation. In addition to having inventory in his house, Higgins filled two garages with furniture. Word-of-mouth referrals began bringing more customers in the door.

"Lois (and I) both were holding down full-time jobs, and this was just supposed to be an extra form of income, but it totally went into a different direction and ended up consuming most of my time," said Higgins. "I started telling Lois that it was time to open a store and think big."

In a span of a year, Higgins and Thurston quit their jobs and moved Affordable Furniture into retail space in the Plaza 20 shopping center. It was a calculated risk based on customer interest and growth potential shown by past sales made at home.

Like with many new businesses, Higgins admitted there were some sleepless nights. They had to work at maintaining confidence and developing their business plan, which included advancing advertising beyond customer referrals.

Higgins said, "Our customer service, affordability, and quality take our message far ... but continuous branding and awareness into the public's mind and eye is essential."

During Culbertson's condo redecorating, she saw that Affordable Furniture was one of the few local stores offering new and used options. She remains a big fan. When Higgins posts his latest acquisitions on Facebook, Culbertson eagerly views them and shares with others.

To select the inventory, Higgins said, "Quality is the most important rule we stand by. A lot of furniture today is made of man-







Higgins moves a chair for a customer. He started selling furniture in 2017.

made pressed wood, particle board, cardboard, glue and staples, yet the price for this poor quality has skyrocketed to the customer from the big box stores."

Affordable Furniture's inventory features products made from solid wood and other quality materials. The selection includes furniture for all rooms in the house, including chairs, sofas, end tables, entertainment centers, china cabinets, desks, bookshelves and bedroom sets.

Customers come from throughout the tri-states and beyond, including Madison, Wis.; Rock Island, Ill.; and Burlington, Iowa. Higgins and Thurston get to know many of them and count customers as friends.

The business remains family operated

and has seven employees. Higgins is involved in most aspects of the business, including delivery to customers. Thurston manages sales, design and merchandising.

"She enjoys displaying, arranging and coordinating inventory ... and is the key to outstanding customer service that keeps our customers returning and spreading the news. Together, our teamwork has made the business very successful," said Higgins.

Since opening, Affordable Furniture has procured some distinctive pieces to sell. This included a twisted driftwood sofa table and a Thomas Edison phonograph dated in the 1800s.

"Inventory is always changing. Lois does an awesome job going over every piece to be

sure it's clean and in good condition," said Culbertson. Recently, she purchased a ram statue that reminded her of high school at Dubuque Senior, and her husband bought a vintage magazine rack to display history books.

The growing inventory and customer interest prompted Affordable Furniture to move in 2019 just across their parking lot into space about four times the size of their initial spot. They plan to continue adding inventory to meet customer needs.

"The demand for quality furniture is overwhelming," Higgins said. "It is a super great feeling when we know that we truly helped (customers) with their needs. It's a joy that keeps us moving forward."

## AFFORDABLE FURNITURE AND TREASURES



**Owner:** Gary Higgins

**Address:** 2600 Dodge St., Dubuque

**Telephone:** 563-920-3139

**Online:** [www.affordablefurnitureandtreasures.com](http://www.affordablefurnitureandtreasures.com)

**Hours:** 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday-Friday; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.

**Services:** Retail store offering furniture and accessories



# BUSINESSES: Marina, furniture store both expanding

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Munoz said she helped her father lose 90 pounds and her mother lose 40. Now, she hopes her new business will offer a similar benefit to customers.

Pioneer Nutrition makes metabolism-boosting teas and serves healthy shakes packed with protein, vitamins and minerals. The shakes serve as a "meal replacement," Munoz said.

In addition to fitting in with one's diet plan, they are designed to add convenience to customers' busy lifestyles, Munoz said.

"It is a quick option for lunch that is a lot healthier than fast food," she said.

Pioneer Nutrition also counsels clients on their weight-loss goals by crafting meal plans and hosting "weigh-ins" at the facility.

The business is open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday. It can be reached at 904-584-5885.

## MARINA EXPANDS AMENITIES

Even in the dead of winter, officials at Midtown Marina in East Dubuque have found a way to stay busy.

Owner Jeremy McDowell said crews are in the process of constructing new docks and upgrading others.

By the upcoming boating season, Midtown Marina will feature 14 new boat slips and

## business tips sought

Do you have an interesting story or news tip to share about a local business? Story ideas can be shared with Jeff Montgomery by calling 563-588-5753 or by emailing [jeff.montgomery@thmedia.com](mailto:jeff.montgomery@thmedia.com).

16 refurbished ones.

McDowell said there is currently a waiting list for boat slips at the marina.

Some of the upgraded slips are designed to better meet the needs of boaters, McDowell explained. For instance, some spaces that previously accommodated houseboats — which are waning in popularity — have been altered to accommodate increasingly popular pontoon boats.

The improvements are part of a broader plan at Midtown Marina. Jeremy and his wife, Brenda McDowell, took over the marina from his parents, Sandy and Arnie McDowell, in 2017.

"When we took over, we had an idea of certain things we could do and make better," Jeremy McDowell said. "We've been able to take off and really make a go of it. We have a vision of being here and being successful for another 20 or 30 years."

The expansion of the docks is just one of multiple projects the new owners have overseen.

Last year, crews increased the number of campsites from four to 12. McDowell said he plans to add another seven

sites this year.

The improvements have Jeremy feeling optimistic as warmer weather approaches.

"We believe we're going about things the right way here," he said. "We're hoping to have a really good summer."

## FURNITURE STORE EYES EXPANSION

For the second time in less than a year, a Dubuque furniture store is expanding its presence in Plaza 20.

Affordable Furniture & Treasures, 2600 Dodge St., will relocate to a larger location within the same shopping plaza in early May.

Owner Gary Higgins said the business, which opened early last year, will move into the space currently occupied by Second Chances, a consignment shop that will close next month.

The new location spans 6,500 square feet, Higgins said. The business currently has a 1,750-square-foot retail space, as well as a warehouse spanning 2,700 square feet.

The move also will allow the business to double its workforce from five to 10 employees.

Plenty of work must be

done before the move is made.

"We are totally gutting it," said Higgins. "The walls are coming down, and we're putting in brand-new flooring."

Since opening the furniture and antiques store last year, Higgins has been pleasantly surprised by the interest from local customers.

The high demand prompted the company to start utilizing the additional warehouse space, located behind the former Save-a-Lot grocery store in Plaza 20, last summer.

Once the move is complete, the business will consolidate all of its operations in one structure.

"We're happy to be here," Higgins said. "We feel like it's a thriving place."

Affordable Furniture & Treasures is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends. Higgins said those hours likely will be expanded once the move is complete.

The business can be reached at 563-582-5597.



## AFFORDABLE FURNITURE AND TREASURES



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**QUALITY AT UNBEATABLE PRICES!**



[www.affordablefurnitureandtreasures.com](http://www.affordablefurnitureandtreasures.com)