



JEROME A. POLLOS/Press Mike Beard, left, and Pat Way have transitioned from managers of Orvis Northwest Outfitters to being the owners of the Riverstone storefront.

Will fish for work

Mike Beard, Pat Way new owners of Orvis Northwest Outfitters

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By **BILL BULEY**/Staff writer

COEUR d'ALENE - As the front door at Orvis Northwest Outfitters opens, a black lab busts in, tail wagging, tongue hanging, and dashes over to Mike Beard and Pat Way.

"Tika," as the canine is called, bounces around each man for a few seconds, then merrily bolts away with owner Teresa toward the back of the shop at 2171 N. Main St. in the Riverstone development.

"We're very dog friendly here," Way says, smiling. "We couldn't be a fly shop without dogs."

"Dogs are welcome," Beard adds with a grin.

The ways of Beard and Way are now the rules at Orvis Northwest Outfitters, since they recently bought the business.

Way worked 10 years at Orvis when it was on U.S. 95, and Beard, three. Last year, it moved to Riverstone, where they've since been the managers.

"We felt we learned a lot. We established good relationships with our customers," Beard said. "We were confident with moving forward that we could make it happen."

And they're darn glad for it.

"It's pretty nice to wake up in the morning and go do what you want to do for work," Way added.

Beard and Way are both avid anglers, with Beard a big fan of the St. Joe, while Way's favorite fishing hole happens to be Lake Coeur d'Alene. Together, the two friends are having fun operating the specialty fly fishing shop and serving a strong, loyal core of North Idaho's fishermen, along with ready rookies.

Beard says he's more the big picture person, while Way looks after the details.

"We're excited to get out of this what we put in," Way said. "It's our show now."

Fishing friends

Monday morning saw both busy with customers. One client was outfitting his son with fishing gear for Christmas. Another was looking over the fishing accessories, while a woman debated what to buy for her husband.

Their comfortable, cozy store features everything an angler could want.

There's the latest in boots and waders. There's the high-tech coats and gloves. There are books, instructional videos and eye-catching pictures. The back wall lined with Orvis fishing rods and a few feet away are Orvis reels. Both also offer guided trips.

"We tie in with the Orvis lifestyle," Way said.

There's also something you can't buy, but is available only if you ask: Their knowledge.

Beard, a 2000 Moscow High grad, and Way, a 1997 graduate of Post Falls High School, were both introduced to fishing when they were boys. For Beard, his mentor was a retired Marine colonel who took the 8-year-old under his wing.

"I credit him with putting the bug in me, basically," Beard said. "Fly fishing is one of the few things I can say I've been doing for 20 years."

For Way, his Big Brother from Big Brother Big Sisters taught him how to catch a fish.

Beard loves talking about fishing, taking people fishing, helping them learn to fish.

"I catch fish. I catch big fish. But that's not why I go. It's the process," he said. "Once people learn that, their lives are better for it. Just understand that the minute you wake up you're going fishing that day, it's a good day no matter what happens."

Way outfitted some two men who wanted to start fishing.

"You want to talk about life changing for those guys. Now they're all consumed," Way said. "And it's a cool thing."

Beard said even with more regulations and more fisherman on the waters, North Idaho's fishery continues to improve.

He and Way are "not only putting fishermen out there, but they're putting good fishermen out there" who obey the rules and respect the resources.

"We are responsible for that," Beard said.

"Absolutely," Way added.

On their own

While they had some concerns about venturing into their own business in an uncertain economy, they decided taking the chance was better than not.

"It's kind of like fishing. There's no guarantees but if you work at it ..." Way said.

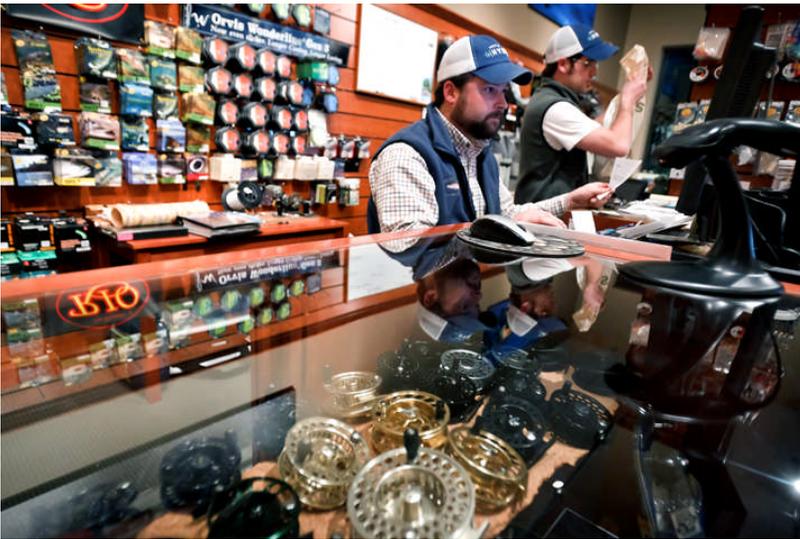
"The payoff is there," Beard adds.

Beard, 28, and Way, 32, don't plan to change anything but do look forward to establishing their own traditions.

"Most of the stuff, we've implemented. Now it's just tightening the ship, being able to control everything. If one of us says it's going to get done, it'll get done," Beard said.

Way said they'll continue to focus on "service, service, service, all the time."

Both will work full time, but both also plan to hit the lakes and rivers as often as possible.



"We will find a way to make sure that happens," Way said.

"About as much as we like," Beard added.

If one's sensing the other is tired, time for a fishing break to come back recharged for work - these are business partners who understand that fishing is life.

No joke.

"We both got into this originally we were going to guide," Way said. "That's what I would have done all year. This was just such a great opportunity. It's

hard to guide without a shop."

Beard couldn't pinpoint exactly what's different since they took charge, but he knows there is something different.

Friday morning, a group of some of their diehard customers were sitting, drinking coffee and each time someone walked in, the group looked up and asked "How's it going?"

That's the kind of friendly, bantering atmosphere Beard and Way are after.

It's a good combination, fishing and work.

"That's ours. That's cool," Way said.