

Store focus is healthy feet; cruel shoes need not apply

Dan McGee, 8/6/2007

The sign in front of the new Shoes-n-Feet store by South Meadows Parkway is a tipoff that this is not a normal shoe store. The sign says, "It's not normal for your feet to hurt," a clue to the store's philosophy.

Shoes-n-Feet is a franchise created in Seattle by a fifth-generation shoemaker from Holland, and is independently owned by Derek Anders, a local podiatrist, and his wife Dani, who runs the operation.

"It's the first business I've run, although I helped my husband at his practice for awhile," she says. The idea came from the experience Dr. Anders had when he found his patients had difficulty finding shoes with a reliable fit.

"There really was a need in this community," Dani Anders says. "Our focus is on the shoes we provide and the supports we sell, which cost no more than \$48. We advise people that if they are going to spend more, they should see a doctor and have orthotics made."

Unlike many retail outlets, the store's marketing is narrowly focused on a certain area.

"Our goal is to work hand-in-hand with the doctors and medical community in general," says Anders. "On the wall we actually have every podiatrist represented for Reno, Tahoe and Gardnerville, except for Derek. We wanted to make sure we're supporting them and that this isn't just a referral source for Derek."

After a soft opening in February, the store held a grand opening in May.

"We wanted to be sure we had everything down and our routine was running smoothly," she says. "We also had a doctor's night for podiatrists to show them what we do."

Running a retail operation is even harder than fighting with insurance companies, says Anders, a task to which she's accustomed.

"It's been a steep learning curve," she says.

Training is key to the staff's level of service. Everyone, says Anders, including herself, completed 160 hours of training to pass a difficult, five-hour test required to become a certified shoe-fitting specialist. That's necessary when dealing with customers who are also patients.

Physicians that send patients to the store receive a form telling them which shoes the patient chose. There's also a form doctors can use to specify what shoe is needed.

As for the shoes, Anders says she carries only those able to pass certain tests, and which have removable beds that allow orthotics to fit inside.

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The service starts as soon as a customer walks in and asks about shoes.

“We do a full evaluation as we measure the customer’s feet and arches,” she said. “They’re usually surprised by this, especially when we use shoe horns during the fitting.

“It’s really important as what we are looking at is fitting people with the right shoe, she says. “Even if we see that we won’t make the sale, our priority is that we’re really dealing with foot health.”

The best part of the business, she adds, is “When a customer comes back in, walking normally, and asks if we remember how they were limping during their previous visit.”

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