

Young entrepreneur sets up dollar store to help Easthampton save

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer



JERREY ROBERTS

Daniel Marques, right, owner of Easthampton Dollar, helps his brother, Alex Domina, 8, stock gift bags Saturday.

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EASTHAMPTON – Everything costs a dollar at this Union-Street store, set to open Saturday morning.

After two years of planning, 22-year-old Daniel Marques, of Easthampton, is ready to open his business, Easthampton Dollar, located at 53 Union St., which housed Easthampton Bicycle before it closed last year.

'You can't even tell it's the same place,' Marques said of the 1200-square-foot store that holds between 25,000 and 30,000 items ranging from eyeglasses to tools to cooking and cleaning supplies. 'Patience was important. I wanted to make the right decision and I learned a lot along the way.'

The store is located on the end of Union Street in close proximity to Cottage Street.

'Finding a location is definitely one of the biggest challenges. There's a lot of great and interesting neighbors in terms of the stores nearby.'

The store is completely stocked, Marques said Friday, and finishing touches were set to be completed over the weekend by family members and college roommates.

'There's quite a bit of stuff in here,' said Neil Domina, Marques' dad, while stocking baby wipes and diapers Friday. 'The thing about the dollar store is it's pretty much impulse buying.'

A 2007 spring graduate of Babson College in Wellesley, a business school renowned for its entrepreneurship program, Marques also works for VistaPrint, an Internet company in Boston. He was named Entrepreneur of the Year in 2006 by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, a nonprofit dedicated to teaching entrepreneurship to young people in low-income communities, when he was a college junior majoring in business administration with a concentration in entrepreneurship.

He said he also did consulting work for eight to 10 small businesses in western Massachusetts three years ago, helping people to improve their business plans.

'I had a fun college experience and I spent a lot of time outside the classroom,' Marques said. 'I knew I wanted to have a business in western Mass. I wanted to do something that would be actually beneficial.'

A couple of years ago Marques started speaking with family and Easthamptonites about what kind of business the town needed. Without a Wal-Mart or Costco in town, a few people he asked indicated that there was a need for best-selection, cheap-priced items.

'With the economy the way it is now and people pinching their pennies this is something that will help the citizens of Easthampton,' said Joan LaRose, of Easthampton.

'The stuff that's in there is pretty good stuff.'

LaRose, who is Marques' aunt, said that about 15 family members and close friends helped Marques stock and set up the store. Some family members will be employees. Marques said he is expecting to have six to 10 employees.

Meanwhile, LaRose is working on plans to get Mayor Michael A. Tautznik at the ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday, she said.

'I see it (the store) as a really good thing for our town,' LaRose said.

The products - candles, greeting cards, toys, books, stationery, snacks, clothing accessories, pet supplies and more - are purchased and distributed from 10 to 15 wholesale and distribution companies in the United States, primarily on the East Coast.

Once one item is found, the wholesaler often refers Marques to another company for a different product, he said.

'You kind of find this network,' Marques said. 'These are probably items that somewhere else would be \$1.50 to \$3 or \$4 ... it's just a question of where are they buying it from and what is their mark-up. You get to decide what the end price is going to be and we're fixing that at a dollar, which actually makes it easy because you don't have to make those kinds of pricing decisions, you just pick the inventory.'

The tentative store hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

'I'm hoping it becomes a long-standing fixture in the community,' said Marques, who grew up in Chicopee and moved to Easthampton five years ago.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.