

# Special Brew

Jodi Erickson shakes her head when she thinks that her family business" Meg's Daily Grind, has been around 14 years.

"We've truly been blessed.. " she says of the coffee shop ,with four Rockford locations. "I believe God opened doors for us that we never would have imagined. It's truly an honor to serve the customers of Rockford."



Meg's Daily Grind is Owned by Jodi and her husband, Chris, with daughters Megan and Leslie. The inspiration to start the business came from the daughters, both of whom had worked in coffee shops during high school. Leslie earned a business degree from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., before returning home. Megan, who started college but decided it wasn't for her, was looking for a career opportunity. That's when the family decided to pursue their own venture.

To get a better grip on the business, the family traveled to Seattle to research a number of coffee shops. They sampled coffees and snapped photos, evaluating what they liked best. They even brought samples home to friends for additional feedback. "We read a lot of books and talked to a lot of people,"

Jodi says. "People are wonderful and will give you advice."

The first Meg's opened in 2001, on East Riverside Boulevard, later moving four blocks east to 3885 N. Perryville Road, so that a drive-thru could be added. In 2002, Meg's opened a kiosk at Rock Valley College's library. In 2006, Meg's opened a cafe at 1141 N. Alpine Road, and later that year opened a fourth location at Heartland Church, 1280 S. Alpine Road. Megan oversees the Perryville and Rock Valley locations, while Leslie manages the Alpine and Heartland sites. Jodi handles financial responsibilities.

Meg's Daily Grind employs 50 people, mostly part-time high school and college students ,along with a few seasoned workers. Meg's offers blended, organic and fair trade coffees, along with espresso, house coffees and more than 100 flavored coffees. Every week, Meg's orders beans from small-batch roasters in Madison and Chicago. Meg's also serves pastries, light lunches, desserts, fruit smoothies and hot and cold teas.

There have been challenges Over the years mostly related to product and maintenance costs. Equipment such as espresso machines, refrigerators and computers need to be replaced. The price of milk has doubled since Meg's first opened. "We want to stay competitive but we're small," Jodi says.

A larger corporation can buy cups in volume, for example, but we can't. Just when you think you 're getting ahead, something happens."

The Erickson's are encouraged by the Transform Rockford movement, and what it could mean for businesses like theirs. "Anything that will transform Rockford, for schools and for people to live, that's what Rockford needs," says Leslie. "I think a transformed Rockford would help bring people to town and keep people here. That can only help local businesses like ours." The Erickson's say they're here to stay.

"Rockford is a great community, and it has really supported our business." says Jodi. "We' ll never get rich doing this, but we've made friendships that will last a lifetime. I wouldn't trade it for anything."