

Pielhops ready to carry Wieting legacy

By David Nordby
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BRILLION – Sarah and Jason Pielhop understand the significance of becoming the first non-Wieting family members to own Wieting Funeral Homes, serving Brillion and Reedsville.

But to them, Merlin “Fuzzy” and Kathy Wieting, the longtime owners of the funeral home, are like family.

“This is something that they wanted us to do and trusted us to do. Fuzzy’s dad started here back in 1957, so I mean it’s a family legacy,” Jason said.

“It was awesome that they trusted us with that,” Sarah said.

“We’re literally living in the apartment that they grew up in and now it’s ours,” Jason said.

“We’re doing the same story they did. We’re working here, we’re living here, we’re going to be in the community for a longtime,” Sarah said.



The Pielhop family (Jason, daughters Nora and Julia, and Sarah) stands outside of Pielhop Wieting Funeral Homes in Brillion. The Pielhops are the new owners of Wieting, adding their name to the business that has locations in Brillion and Reedsville. (Melissa B. Photography photo)

The marquee outside now reads Pielhop Wieting Funeral Homes, making it official that Fuzzy, who became a licensed funeral director in 1978, and Kathy, are retired from the family business.

Fuzzy and Kathy’s succession plan to the Pielhops was first discussed in 2015.

“Five years ago they talked to us and trusted us to continue being in Brillion and Reedsville if we could figure out a way that it was feasible,” Sarah said.

The transitional process did not start until 2019.

“It started with the business evaluations and stuff like that then COVID happened so that slowed a lot of stuff up. We had probably, I think three, closing dates,” Jason said.

The new sign has been ready since March and stored until two weeks ago when the closing date finally hap-

pened. The delays in the ownership change because of COVID might have been a blessing in disguise.

“It was just everything that it really proved to us whether we really wanted this bad enough or not,” Sarah said.

There will be immediate changes the Pielhops implement, other than the addition of their name on the business.

“You’re going to see us capping the side parking lot because that had high levels of [PFAs],” Sarah said. “There are some things we have to do to make sure we’re in compliance of our loan ... We had to do environmental testing, Phase 1 and Phase 2. Mary Kohrell and Harris from Stantec have been amazing with working us in Calumet County for the Brillion location because there’s no way we

could have bought this funeral home without the [Calumet County EPA Grant] that they got.”

There will be changes inside the building, too, like a complete renovation of the basement.

“We’re going to open that all up. We have a complete sound system coming in the middle of October. Jon Kees is going to come and fix some sidewalks and the chimney for us. [Kempen Excavating] came and graded our parking lot, took all the dirt out so we could have this other contractor come and do the black-top,” Pielhop said.

Cosmetically, there will be a “facelift” coming to the funeral home within the next year.

“We’ll get some new flooring. Electronically, we already started. With COVID, we already do an app for our phone for funeral arrangements. We upgraded our website,” Pielhop said.

The funeral home is also now tied into news services as part of the Leg-

acy network. They offer online and digital prearrangements for funeral pre-planning and pre-paying. Video montages are now available for families.

“There’s a lot of things that happened because of COVID, which it’s been hard, but some of it’s been good,” Sarah said. “We’ve always done personalization but we’re just adding another component of it.”

Sarah has been the funeral director since she came to Brillion in 2010, and has worked closely with Fuzzy and Kathy since then.

“The only thing that’s different is now it’s just me, but now I’m bringing my husband into it,” Sarah said.

Judy Cohen, the office manager, is staying on to work for Sarah and Jason. They hope in the future to hire another funeral director.

Jason still works for the fire department in Manitowoc but left his position with the Brillion Fire Department to free up more time for the business and the couple’s two

daughters.

“It’s just the time and ability to be able to get some of the stuff done because I kind of take care of the properties and stuff like that. I want to be able to give a commitment to Brillion that I feel is appropriate and I just didn’t feel that was feasible at this time (to stay with the Brillion Fire Department),” Jason said.

Jason, originally from Eau Claire, said that he never had a desire to leave Brillion after he got here.

“Everybody embraced both me and Sarah. It’s a town that we want to be a part of for the rest of our lives,” Jason said.

He hopes to be more integrated in the community than he already has been.

“I always joke that I’m affectionately known as Sarah’s husband, and hopefully it comes a point where I get a little more involved than I already was and it’s like ... oh, ‘Hi Jason,’” Jason said. “Brillion and Reedsville are home to us,” Sarah said.

As a funeral home, they are an integral part of the communities they serve.

“Grief has a lot of different steps and one of the major ones to help people realize what has really happened is having a funeral,” Sarah said. “We’re always looking for ways to personalize a final good-bye because it is important to acknowledge that person and it’s about the living as well. It’s about who’s left behind and what kind of legacy that person left and honoring that and honoring the wishes of what the family needs to be OK.”

Sarah says that the goal will be to continue to have the trust of the community.

“The Wieting family is an amazing family and they’ve always done right by everybody that they served, and the fact that they trusted us with their business to continue is amazing. We’ve been floored by that. We’ve been blessed, for sure,” Sarah said.