

Hardware Plus serving customers during pandemic

By David Nordby
The Brillion News

BRILLION – Hardware Plus has been a hotspot during the coronavirus pandemic. Customers, ranging from familiar faces to first timers, are relying on the store to supply their various projects they are working on during the social distancing period.

When Governor Tony Evers announced social restrictions last month, the store was initially deemed nonessential. That was quickly changed.

“Hardware stores are more than just hardware stores sometimes in small towns. You look at us with seed potatoes and garden seeds all the way to plumbing and electrical to small engine repair,” Mike Buboltz, who owns the store with his wife, Joy, said.

Mike says that people working from home, laid off or furloughed quickly needed projects to work on. Painting is at the top of that list.

“Painting has just been soaring through the roof for us with this pandemic ... We mix almost 20 gallons of



Hardware Plus in Brillion is staying busy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Owners Mike and Joy Buboltz say customers are using the extra time to work on projects around their house. The store owners also say they are meeting new customers. (David Nordby/BN)

paint a day,” Mike said.

Mike says that fresh paint can make the house feel fresh.

“I think when you’re home a nice coat of paint and the smell of paint in your house, it just gives you that new

home feeling and smell,” Mike said.

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Projects like painting, Mike says, can help make people feel better.

“I think making people feel good is quite important at this time because they’re going bonkers,” Mike said.

Customers who have come in the store have been working on plumbing, electrical and garage repairs.

“Just about every category across the board. I think people are finally just getting caught up on their day-to-day problems that were always put on the backburner,” Mike said.

Mike and Joy say keeping everything that people want stocked has been the biggest challenge.

“They come for everything, but not everything at one time, so we’re doing a lot of special orders,” Mike said.

Hardware stores are helping each other out by shipping products to one another, as many customers limit travel.

“A lot of the people are not in favor of going to The Valley right now. They’d rather stay close to home, so

they’re looking more to us for product,” Joy said.

Customers can get items shipped directly to the store with free pickup.

“That social distancing, people are really taking to heart,” Joy said.

Customers can pick up items shipped to the store. Mike and Joy are putting in extra hours to handle backstock and make sure everything is properly sanitized. They begin and end each day with that.

“Every single morning, we sanitize so we don’t start our own little pandemic here,” Mike said. “Trying to keep everything full and everyone safe.”

Joy, who recently retired from the City of Brillion as deputy clerk treasurer, has become a “hardware girl” just like Mike told her she would after her retirement from the city.

“He’s happy,” Joy says laughing. “It’s gone very well, especially now since it’s been a little bit busier and stuff, so I’ve been able to fill in when it’s busy.”

“This couldn’t have happened at a better time, to be honest. If I didn’t have Joy with this pandemic thing going on, we’d really be running

around dragging. We just wouldn’t know what to do,” Mike said. “It’s absolutely great. I don’t know what I’d do without her.”

Mike says that Joy knows every facet of the business, so she helps wherever necessary.

Inside the store, customers are trying to keep their distance from each other, particularly at the checkout.

“The people are very scared. They’re very scared. They do take it to heart and they’re very serious about it,” Mike said.

As the weather turned nicer, people could work on the outside of their homes more, too.

“It was great to have a nice April for once because of all the bad stuff going on ... They’re by themselves in their own yards. They’re getting their yards all spruced up,” Mike said.

Joy says that people are coming in saying that for the first time they have time to build a garden.

“I think canning is going to be big in the fall,” Mike said. “This is a big wakeup call for society. You have to get back to the basics ... I think this helps everybody ... The food

shortages are kind of staring at us in a roundabout way, I think it’s a wakeup call.”

Mike and Joy also operate the Brillion Power Equipment store on Highway 10. They say that with the nicer weather, that has also picked up the last two weeks after a slower period when the pandemic started.

“We’re rebounding nicely,” Mike said.

Between the two stores, they have about 12 employees. All have remained in place during the pandemic.

“If you don’t feel comfortable here, then you really should not be here,” Mike recalled telling the employees. “And they all voted to stay here. We offer masks and stuff, if we get some sanitizer, we make sure our employees and their families get it first.”

The silver lining has been meeting new customers.

“We actually slotted in quite a few new items to try and be accommodating for newer customers,” Mike said.

That has increased awareness for the store.

“There’s a lot of people who

didn’t realize we are here. I know we’re a little hidden, but they’re finding out where we are, and we appreciate all the business we are getting from people,” Joy said. “It’s a good feeling ... We’re always here to welcome new faces.”

The store is open Monday-Friday 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

On Saturday, the store has ‘Donut Saturday’ and jars of candy for kids.

“You try to do a little bit like that to say thank you to the customer for coming in,” Joy said.

Some customers who have been coming into Brillion have taken notice of that hospitality, Mike says.

“Brillion’s a friendly community and a lot of businesses do what we do, to some degree. There’s always something that they’re giving away something for free. Maybe Brillion as a whole, maybe we’ve developed a bigger consumer base during this pandemic ... I think people as a whole are patronizing Brillion quite good in a lot of different businesses,” Mike said.