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Photo by Hannah Davis

Forest Lake store manager Sandy Ward stands at the new check-out counter in the old feed mill, which will be used as a new retail space. The slats of wood around the counter was from the Houle's Hugo farm.

Gertens honors legacy of Houle's in remodel

Spikes & Houles to open new retail space soon

Hannah Davis
News Editor

On the outside of the old E.J. Houle's grain elevator, the old logo was recently repainted on the side of the newly renovated building. The skyline of Forest Lake had not only stayed intact, but has been given a refresh as the Gertens Lawn and Garden family brand has worked to honor the Houle family's legacy in the downtown corner of Forest Lake.

But stepping into the newly renovated space of Spikes & Houles — the business's name since Gertens bought the business in September 2020 — it's more than just the

Houle name that's represented on the side of an extensive remodel. Easter eggs of the old Houle's Feed Mill, originally built in 1916, are scattered throughout the entire new retail spot.

The big green mixer still remains in the same location. The I.T. room is hidden behind a sliding door original to the building. The wood flooring, while not original, is repurposed lumber from construction. A light switch that was in the original building was moved between the new bathrooms and still functions to turn on and off the light. The thin slats of wood that the Houles brought in from their Hugo farm still stand, but make what is now the check-out counter. The iconic beams in

the center of the building still stand, though they're reinforced now. And even funny signs that were kept from the old building are still tacked to beams.

"We like to save as much as we can," said Eric Joanis, the regional manager of Spikes & Houles.

Seemingly everywhere you look in the new retail space, which managers hope to open in the coming weeks, there's a part of the Houle's legacy.

And that's by design.

"When we look at just the legacy of the Houle's name, what that means to the community, the preservation of what we can preserve just becomes that much more important," said Tom Morgantini, the company's assistant general

manager of all the Spikes' locations.

"That's the reason why we did it the way we did it. There's a lot of history here," Joanis said.

It simply boded well that Sandy Ward, Forest Lake's store manager, loves local history and is especially interested in the Houle's legacy, as she had worked for the Houles in their Stillwater location before the business's sale. Ward has spent hours with the Houle family learning more about their Forest Lake location, the history of the business, and about the community of Forest Lake, and was impressed by how the remodel was handled.

"They were very contentious and respectful

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Act on Alzheimer's events help loved ones of those with memory struggles learn what their experiences are

After pandemic nearly shuttered local branch, events return to help community members with caregiving

Natalie Ryder
Community Editor

For someone without dementia, Alzheimer's or memory struggles, it may be hard to understand the experience

that someone with those disabilities may face when completing daily tasks. But the Act on Alzheimer's Lakes Area branch, covering Forest Lake to Chisago Lakes, created a small series of tests to demonstrate how completing daily tasks can be impacted by dementia or Alzheimer's at a recent open house. The tasks were seemingly simple: find a matching pair of socks, read some text, button a shirt, or open a Lindt chocolate

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Photo by Natalie Ryder
Lynea Mester and her husband, Gary, as they work through the button-up shirt section of the course. Lynea said her husband's goggles were almost completely blinding, while she could see through one eye.

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Hannah Davis | 763-233-0709 | hannah.davis@apgecm.com

Alzheimer's

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truffle wrapper. But do so while wearing vision-impairing goggles, plastic gloves and holding a straw in your mouth.

"The blind was leading the blind," said event attendee Lynea Mester, of Forest Lake, adding she could only see out of one eye with the goggles on, while her husband could barely see at all. Experiencing that series of tests was a challenge, helping people understand hurdles someone with dementia or Alzheimer's faces daily.

"We hit the jackpot today, this is the jackpot. These people are amazing. I'm so grateful," Mester said.

Mester began attending a dementia-friendly group at the YMCA and programs like this so she "could be educated and understand." It's personal for her, as has been learning how to help her brother.

Before she attended some of the YMCA classes, she didn't know about available resources she could tap into for support in caring for her brother. Attending the Act on Alzheimer's event on Thursday, Nov. 16, expanded her network, since several dementia-friendly businesses set up information booths.

"I'm wowed. I'm really wowed," she said.

Since Mester and her husband, Gary, have

been helping to take care of her brother, learning more about memory care has been a crucial step in providing supportive care.

"I'm not alone; I feel better. I guess that really helped for my brother, because I want to give him the best care I can," Lynea said.

Events and organizations like this have been helpful, too, for Bob Rosenquist, of Hugo, whose wife is in a memory care center.

"You're still at home wondering 'Why?' or 'How come?'" Rosenquist said.

He's never received that answer about why his wife's memory started failing her, but he said learning more information and ensuring he remains healthy is one of his priorities.

The event also offered a casual and approachable way to take a brief cognitive test to let participants know if there's cause for concern or not.

"Usually it's somebody they know saying, 'Hey, let's have you go do this and just sit down with the social worker,'" said Deb Newton, a caregiving and aging social worker with Family-Means.

Newton administered "Mini-Cog" tests, which help determine how good their memory is on a scale of zero to five. The test takes five minutes and is a quick way to help an individual gain perspective on

where their cognitive health stands. The test isn't a sure-fire way to determine someone has dementia or Alzheimer's, but it could raise an early flag of concern for someone to speak with their doctor and do a more thorough test.

"It gets people to kind of go, 'OK, there might be something here; I should talk to my doctor,'" Newton said.

Becoming dementia-friendly

Act on Alzheimer's is a Minnesota organization that is a decade old. Although there has been an action community, or branch, in the Forest Lake area for many years, the pandemic ground the local advocacy nearly to a halt.

"It almost disintegrated completely. So I kind of came back in, decided to kind of help resuscitate it," said Miriam Aaland, president of the Act on Alzheimer's Lakes Area action community.

She worked with Amira Choice for many years and knows the impact of Alzheimer's or dementia touches the

lives of many people. So organizing programs like the one in mid-November continues to offer resources and pave a path forward as a more dementia-friendly society.

"We're here to educate our whole community on how to be more dementia-friendly," Aaland said.

She described a business having a large unisex bathroom could be useful for a caregiver who may need to assist someone to go use the facilities.

Day to day, being more dementia-friendly isn't reserved only for businesses. Small courtesies, like being patient if someone is struggling at a cash register or ordering food at a restaurant, can help a community become an overall more dementia-friendly place.

"Be patient," Aaland advised.

Even though this was the first big event the Lakes Area branch of Act on Alzheimer's hosted in recent years, Aaland hopes that she can work toward making Forest Lake, Wyoming and Chisago Lakes

more dementia-friendly. "If we could get our local area to be on the road map, so to speak, for being a dementia-friendly community, I mean, that is our goal," Aaland said.

The local branch will

host another event from 3 to 4 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 30, at the Hardwood Creek Library. More information on the Lakes Area community can be found online at actonalzlakesarea.org.

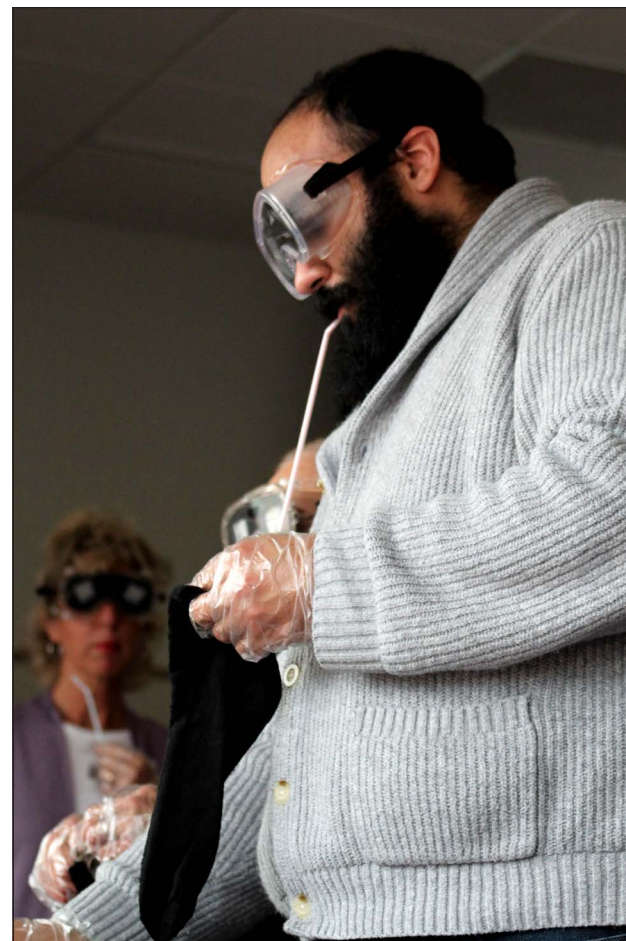


Photo by Natalie Ryder

Attendees had to find matching sized socks while wearing vision-impairing goggles to simulate vision struggles individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's experience.

22nd Annual
Chisago Lake Lutheran Church
Saturday, December 2nd, 2023
9 am - 3 pm
BAZAAR & BAKE SALE
Over 30 Vendors & Raffles
Cinnamon Rolls & Coffee
Bethlehem Bakery Bake Sale
Antique Items for Sale
Chisago Lake Lutheran Church
1 Summit Ave, Center City

SHINES A STAR
Friday, Dec. 1 • 7:30pm
Elim Lutheran Church
20971 Olinda Tr. N., Scandia, MN
Sunday, Dec. 3 • 3:00PM
Chisago Lake Lutheran Church
1 Summit Dr., Center City, MN
Presented by
UNEXPECTED COMPANY CHORALE
All tickets \$15, available in advance from
chorale members or at the door.
For more info scan the code or visit UCCHORALE.ORG
This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the East Central Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.