

THE ROSSEAU GENERAL STORE'S NEW SHOPKEEPERS CELEBRATE THEIR FIRST YEAR

BY PATTI VIPOND

The first time they visited the Rosseau General Store, Laurie McDonald and her husband Brian Dollin felt good energy and a connection to past shopkeepers. Little did they know that seven months later, they would add their names to the store's long history.



In 1874, Jerry Homer opened the Rosseau General Store and it has operated continuously as such since then. In past times, customers presented shopping lists at the counter and staff ran around to pick up groceries. Self-serve shopping changed how customers shopped, but the store itself is the original article. McDonald and Dollin's plan is to keep it that way while making a few needed improvements. That news was a relief to many in the community.

"People were apprehensive, but we fully respect the heritage of the business," says McDonald, who feels embraced by the fantastic local community. "We looked around and saw we needed to upgrade some equipment and become self sufficient in case the power went out. This past winter, we took on those two projects. We put in a big generator so we'll have coverage and won't lose any food, and installed new refrigeration units. Otherwise, there's been lots of fresh paint and elbow grease applied. This big old building needed some tender loving care and we feel quite honoured to be able to do it."



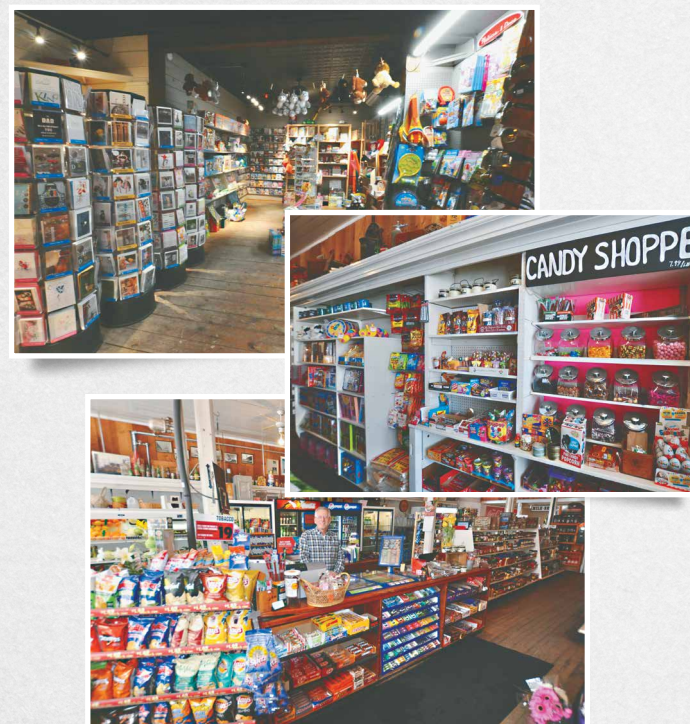
Laurie McDonald and Brian Dollin had a dream about owning a store. They would run it as partners and ideally it would be located in a heritage building. The entrepreneurial spouses' dream came true in Muskoka during March 2017 when they became the new owners of the historical Rosseau General Store.

However, 'owners' may not be the proper description.

"The previous owners always felt they were the store's keepers, not the owners," says McDonald, who took advantage of a chance to change her career and buy the village's beloved landmark with her husband. "I feel it is key that we are the keepers of something very special here, both people's memories and a heritage property. I believe the Rosseau General Store is among the top five general stores in Ontario in terms of longevity."

After a successful first year, the shopkeepers look forward to opening their popular ice cream parlour and renowned butcher shop for a second busy summer season. Their six-person winter staff blossoms to 30 employees as cottagers and tourists arrive. An outdoor array of fresh local produce will again welcome customers as they arrive at the store.

"This year we want to strengthen our partnerships with growers and farms to carry more local produce," explains McDonald. "Last year, we upgraded our meats' quality to AAA. It's important to us that as a butcher shop, we carry the highest quality meat. We also created a fabulous partnership with Campus Crew to develop a line of Rosseau clothing. It's been embraced by the community, so we'll soon have a new spring line."



With Daniel, the youngest of the couple's four children, working alongside his parents, the store is a family affair. Manager Debbie Kerr is also part of the store's family. McDonald calls Kerr, who has worked at the general store for over 20 years, the business' stronghold.

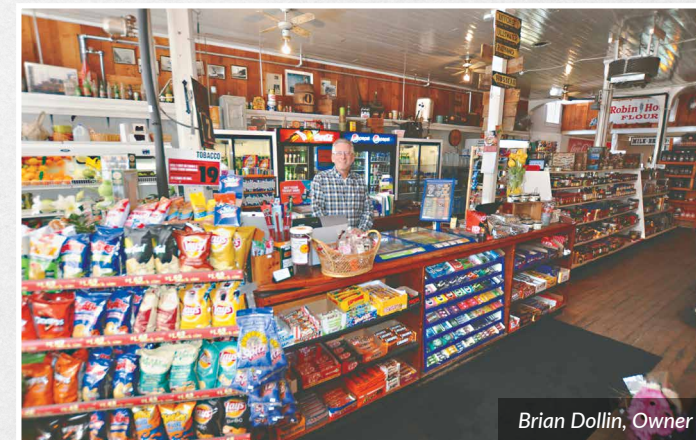
"Debbie is the expert at making sure we stock everything that our clientele is looking for," says McDonald. "She does most of the

buying for the store. Everyone knows her and she knows everyone's needs and wants."



The friendliness of the tight knit community in Rosseau and its love and support for the store have made village life a joy for the new shopkeepers. McDonald and Dollin love to hear a customer say she has been coming to the store for 60 years, or watch someone step inside, take a deep breath and be thrilled that the store still smells the same.

"We are so, so lucky and very grateful," says McDonald. "The timing was right and our dream came true."



The Rosseau General Store is located at 1 Rice Street in Rosseau, Ontario. For more information, call 705-732-4479 or email shopkeeper@rosseaugeneralstore.ca.

Follow the store on Facebook and Instagram, or visit the new website at <https://rosseaugeneralstore.ca>.