

Wild Birds Unlimited takes to Kingwood's skies

BY SUSAN MCFARLAND

Tribune Correspondent

Bird lovers have a new local shop to find all things bird related, including bird food (seed, seed blends, peanuts, bark butter, suet cakes, seed cylinders and suet cylinders) and bird feeders (cylinder, finch, hopper, nectar, suet feeders, seed tubes and peanut feeders). The shop also has bird houses, hardware (advanced pole systems), nest boxes, bird baths, misters and gifts for bird enthusiasts.

The shop was opened this past December by John and Susie Mims. It is estimated that over 40 million people in the United States observe, photograph or feed birds.

"We offer products to help customers enjoy the hobby of backyard bird feeding. We can help you pick the best foods to feed the bird species that you

would like to target," said John. "Although many feeder birds are residents all year, such as cardinals, chickadees, titmice, house finches and woodpeckers, native sparrows and goldfinches tend to be winter residents. Other species, such as buntings, tend to be here in the summer."

Those interested in finding out more about area birds can attend the free monthly educational program at Wild Birds Unlimited.

"For our grand opening, Wildlife Center of Texas gave an excellent presentation with live birds of prey," said Susie. "On April 14, Paul Gregg presented on 'eBirds of the Spring Migration' and on May 12 at 11 a.m., Barbara Willy of Monarch Gateway will be presenting 'All About Butterflies.' We have scheduled presenters from Sheldon State Park, Montgomery County Bee Keepers, and Jesse Jones Park in the coming months. We have also been out in the community, giving talks about bird feeding at local libraries, garden clubs and the Kingwood Community Center. For bird lovers, there is also a monthly bird walk with the Lake Houston Area Nature Club. It is an informal group that meets for bird walks in East End Park and Sheldon Lake State Park."

The shop has already found a loyal fan base in just a few months.

"Although we just opened, we have had quite a few repeat customers. We have many retired couples who enjoy watching birds at their feeders. We also have families with children who are fascinated by the wildlife that can be observed in their backyard. We have a program for those who buy bird food regularly, WBU's Daily Saving Club. After paying a \$25 membership fee per

year, members get a 15 percent discount on all bird food products. If we have a sale on bird food, members get 5 percent off the sale price. We also track members' total spending. For every \$200 spent in the store, members get a coupon (a 'eBird buck') for \$10 off an in-store purchase," said John.

The couple decided they wanted to open a small business a few years ago.

"John had been working for a geophysical service company and was ready to move on to a new challenge. He began researching franchise opportunities and Wild Birds Unlimited appeared to be the most interesting and fun. I had stopped working several years ago so that I could travel with John," said Susie.

The pair have enjoyed working together, although it has proven to be harder than expected.

"At times working together has been more difficult than we had expected. However, each of us brings our skills and backgrounds to the enterprise. Susie has been involved with working with the general public and I tend to focus on the business side," said John. "Each one of us brings specific skills and experience that makes us much stronger working as a team than individually."

The road to open the shop in late 2017 was replete with challenges and delays before and after Hurricane Harvey.

"In our case, permitting delays worked out in our favor, as when Hurricane Harvey flooded our location, our contractor had only roughed in the plumbing, finished framing and installed sheet rock on the interior walls. Two days before Harvey, he was going to cut a hole in the roof for the HVAC installation, but decided to postpone until after the rain. Our store ended up with 7 feet of water during the flood. Because of the delays, we only lost sheet rock and insulation. Had construction been a couple weeks ahead, we would have lost much more," said John.

The shop – located in the H-E-B Plaza at West Lake Houston Parkway and Kingwood Drive – is one of over 320 Wild Birds Unlimited shops across the United States. The first store opened in Indianapolis in 1981 and franchises have opened across the country since then. There are seven Wild Birds Unlimited stores in the Greater Houston area.

Wild Birds Unlimited is located at 4523 Kingwood Dr., Suite 130, in Kingwood (across from Torchy's Tacos). For more information, check out their website at kingwood.wbu.com or call 281-570-2685.



OWNERS:

Susie and John Mims



Wild Birds Unlimited®
Nature Shop

OPENED DOORS:

December 2017

FAVORITE QUOTE:

With God all things are possible.