

FREEDOM, FAMILY, AND FUN



Through years of hard work and dedication, Dee Stephen and Gavin Archer have created a unique haven, right in our own backyard at Deraillleur Bike Shop Café.

By Amy Paterline



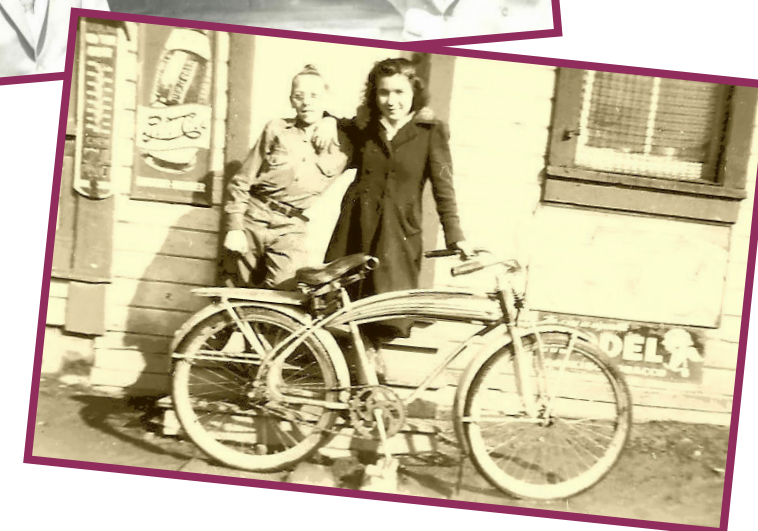
Step into Deraillleur Bike Shop Café and you're sure to be greeted with a hello and a smile. After walking up the old stone steps and opening the creaky screen door, owner Dee Stephen will be waiting behind the counter to offer you her delicious homemade treat or soup of the day. Her husband and co-owner, Gavin Archer, will wander out of his bike shop in the back, to see if he can help with anything. It's the kind of place that you can sit down, relax after a long trail ride, and listen to some quiet music for a few minutes or a few hours if you have the time. Time seems to stand still in this cozy café, a product of the many hours of hard work that Dee and Gavin put into the property, to ensure that the history was not lost.

"There is so much history surrounding this property and this trail," Dee said. "We have older customers come in who remember coming in here when they were children and it was still a general store. When we decided to begin this project, one of our main concerns was updating the building but still retaining the original footprint and history of the property."

Both Dee and Gavin have backgrounds in archaeology and had steady jobs in California when they decided they wanted to start looking for a home closer to Dee's parents in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Avid viewers of "those fixer upper shows" on television, they decided they wanted to buy an old property to restore, preferably by a bike trail, because the couple is big into bike riding. They started looking at properties within 50 miles of Greensburg and came across an old church.

"We were looking at the church and saw an old shack nearby on a bike trail," Dee explained. "There was a 'For Sale By Owner' sign on it and Gavin suggested we just buy that and rent bikes out of it. That was an ah-ha moment for us. We began to really shape the idea of what we wanted to do."

After that, the couple focused their search on properties on or near bike trails that they could restore and begin their bike shop café business. Dee found the Deraillleur property online and sent her parents to look at it, as she and Gavin were back in California. Her parents came



to her with less than stellar reviews of the place.

"I think my dad's exact words were, 'If you get it for free, you paid too much,'" Dee said with a laugh.

Dee and Gavin had never seen the property when the real estate agent approached them saying the seller was very motivated. He asked them to put in an offer if they were interested. The couple made their first offer, thinking it would be the start of the negotiations.

"The real estate agent came back and said 'Congratulations, he accepted,'" Gavin said. "And I thought 'oh my gosh, we just bought THAT house.'"

Built in 1886 by Martin Dittmer, the building and attached house had functioned as a general store, post office, and ticket office for the railroad throughout its history. It was owned by the Dittmer family until Dee and Gavin bought it in 2010, making them the first people outside the family to own the property in approximately 100 years.

"If it had sat for one more winter, it probably would have been beyond saving," said Gavin.

Gavin traveled to Pennsylvania alone to finalize the paperwork and close on the property shortly after they bought it. When Dee called to see what the condition was, there was a long pause before Gavin assured her that it was going to be great.

"Then he asked me to get him a dumpster," Dee said. "When I asked him how big, he said the biggest one you can find. I started to wonder what we had gotten ourselves into!"

The couple spent the next four years flying in quarterly from California to Pennsylvania, where they would work on the house for two weeks before flying back to California. With help from the Progress Fund, a non-profit community development financial institution focused on new or expanding tourism businesses (www.progressfund.org), they were able to complete the massive project. Restoring the building and their attached house at the same time was no small feat.

The building and house had knob and tube electrical wiring and rusting, cast iron plumbing, but in four short years, the couple was able to open their dream business.

During those four years of renovation, every year on the Fourth of July, the couple held a BFC Trail fundraiser to show people what was coming.

“We would sell things like lemonade, ice tea and water, just to get people interested in what we were doing, and to say, ‘this is what is coming!’” Dee said.

For that reason, the Fourth of July held special significance to Derailleur and their grand opening was July 4, 2014. While they began as more of a snack shop, their customers drove them to want to sell more substantial food, like sandwiches and soups, which Dee makes herself every morning from ingredients that are almost all bought locally.

“Sourcing local food and businesses is very important to us,” Gavin explained. “We buy from Schnur’s Country Market, Thomas Meat, Natrona Soda, Speckled Hen, and many more local businesses. We need to support local businesses because we’re small business owners ourselves. It pays you back in the end when these people come back to support Derailleur.”

One could even say that Dee and Gavin’s mission to source local food started with our very own Freedom Farms. While Dee’s parents were on a train trip to Philadelphia, they struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. They told them of their daughter and son-in law’s plans for a small business along the trail in Butler County. He told them of a new television show on the Great American Country Channel called “The Farm Kings” about a large family of organic farmers in Butler County. Dee and Gavin became loyal viewers from California.

“Farm Kings started around the same time we were preparing to move to Pennsylvania,” Dee said. “So it became part of our inspiration to really be a part of the farm to fork movement. In the

winter, we can’t find organic, fresh produce anywhere but Freedom Farms.”

Since their grand opening, Derailleur has built a very loyal customer base. Dee estimates that the trail sees anywhere from a couple hundred to a thousand visitors daily in the summer. People come from all over the area to explore the trail and some come from as far away as Europe.

The couple attributes the success they’ve seen to the synergy between café, bike shop, and rental. With any one of these aspects alone, they don’t believe they could make a living, but with all three together, Derailleur has something to offer for everyone, which is where the name of the shop comes from.

“The derailleur is the part of the bike that moves the chain as you’re shifting gears,” Gavin explained. “We felt that this was a perfect representation of what we’re all about. We’re here to provide for people on the trail and help keep you moving forward. We also took a huge leap to move ourselves forward throughout this whole project.”

According to the couple, this was the hardest part about the whole experience. They left steady jobs with full benefits in California, to come to Pennsylvania and restore a crumbling building. Between financing the renovation, opening a new retail business, and building a customer base, Dee and Gavin certainly had their work cut out for them.

“We had no retail experience besides working small retail jobs in high school,” Dee said. “So to come here and start a brand new venture without having any background or knowledge of how it was all going to work, was the hardest part for me. The actual leap to do it was challenging.”

As challenging as it may have been, Dee and Gavin have built a wonderful, unique business at Derailleur. They know customers by name and shout hello to them as they ride by on their bikes. They have partnered with charities such as the Butler County Humane Society, VOICe (Victim Outreach Intervention Center), and the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, to host events at their shop in the winter.

“We want our customers to have something all year long,” Gavin said. “We’re doing all of this for them and for the trail. We have a lot of work still to do, but we’ve come a long way from when we bought the property six years ago.”

When asked why they wanted to uproot their comfortable lives in California to start over with a new project in Butler, Dee and Gavin take a moment to reflect. Eventually, they both come to the same conclusion: they wanted freedom. While they were not unhappy living in California, their life was stressful and they were ready for a change. Now, without traffic and long commutes to deal with, Dee says that they feel healthier than ever.

“There have certainly been high and low points, but the high points far outweigh the low and more frustrating moments,” she said. “This is something that we built together and we will have it for the rest of our lives. We’re completely relaxed and we’re close to family. It’s the most positive thing we’ve done in the past 20 years.”

So whether you need your bike fixed, you’re hungry for a homemade lunch after a long ride, or you’re just looking for somewhere to sit and relax for a while, stop in to Derailleur Bike Shop Café. Dee and Gavin will be there to greet you with a story and a smile.



BIKE SHOP

Need your chain repaired?

Have a flat tire?

If you’re having bike troubles along the trail, Gavin is more than happy to help out. Bring your bike in for a tune up or a repair.

“As long as it doesn’t have a motor, I’ll fix it!”



CAFE

It’s no secret that the cafe portion of Derailleur is cozy, warm, and inviting. Stop in and enjoy a sandwich or one of their infamous tamales. You won’t be sorry!

“The grilled cheese is definitely a customer favorite. We make it how you like it!”

