

RLF Business Spotlight

Al's Mercantile

Dawson, MN



From paint and plumbing to kitchen supplies and hardware- Al's Mercantile is your one-stop shop in Dawson, MN.

Al and Val Tuff are entrepreneurs at heart. They started multiple businesses before starting Al's Mercantile, one of those being a house flipping business. Al says he always wanted to own a hardware store where he could have all the supplies he needed in one place.

When an opportunity rose for Al to purchase the previous Bate's Hardware Store, he jumped at it with help of funding from the Revolving Loan Fund Program. Later, they acquired the building next to the store and expanded, creating a large space where Al's Mercantile can house a large variety of products for Dawson and the surrounding communities.

Al and Val both enjoy the creative challenge that comes along with being an entrepreneur. They are motivated by imagining what a business or building can be and working hard to make their vision a reality.



Why Dawson?

What is the best part about owning a business in this community?

"The people. You know everybody, that is really helpful. It makes it personal and we can provide attentive service."

Al & Val Tuff



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Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

with Al and Val Tuff

What motivated you to start this business?

It was existing, but I always wanted to own a hardware store. We used to flip houses and we both had jobs, I just always wanted a hardware store so I could get stuff for cost. When this one came open, we decided to go for it.

What were your goals when you first took over this business?

When we first bought this store, we expanded right away. The building next to us was a bakery and had been empty for about 10 years and we wanted to expand so we could have more inventory. We did that right away. Our goal is to have what people in the community need, try to meet their needs so they don't have to be leaving town to find what they need. We also try to give back to the community in different ways, pay it forward.

What do you like about owning a business in Dawson?

The people. You know everybody, that is really helpful. It makes it personal and we can provide attentive service. Being in town for so long and knowing people. There are people who need light bulbs changed and he (Al) actually goes to their house and does that for them just because he knows them.

What is your favorite part about being an entrepreneur?

That creative side- you get to think about how you would see something and how would we do this. Like when we bought the hotel, it is that rush you get from seeing what it can be. We flipped that and sold it and it is still around. Or with the houses we flip, you buy one that looks pretty bad and then you change it to make it into something better, same thing here- when we bought the store, it looked very different from what it is now. You just think, how can we change this to make it work. We changed the outside and inside of the store. Just trying different things. Some of the things we tried worked, and some didn't. You just adjust and go.

What would your main piece of advice be for someone just starting up a business?

Learn as much about it before you get into it. We made some mistakes in the beginning, we knew we could run a business, but we didn't know enough about how everything worked. We have an advantage because we are connected to a larger business, United Hardware. They are our supplier and help us with our books. Ask questions and don't think you need to know everything. We have learned so much and feel like we have now gotten on top of all of that. Enjoy it, if you are not enjoying it then there is something that is not right.

How has the RLF helped you become the business you are today?

It (the funds) was used to purchase the building. We would not have been able to finance it if we didn't have that help.