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Quest for a daycare has been difficult for Jan Karrmann

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Like many others, Jan Karrmann has a dream of becoming an independent business owner.

And, even though she has spent more than a year pursuing this dream and still has no business to show for it, Karrmann has not given up hope. Nor will she.

Her dream to operate a daycare facility started out almost two years ago as a series of numbers and ideas on a napkin. Now, she has a building plan, a lot in mind and more concrete hopes for the future. Despite her countless hours of planning, preparing and sitting through meeting after meeting, Karrmann's future is still just a dream.

Throughout the course of time, Karrmann has learned the wheels of progress turn slowly, and far more than she ever expected about city rules and regulations. Still, she is determined to make her daycare a reality.

A mom first

A while back, Karrmann and her husband were looking for daycare for their three children. Residents of Farmington for nine years, they have done home daycare and also gone to daycare centers. One thing they have come to know is that, regardless of where parents take their children, daycare is not cheap. And it gets more expensive when there are three children involved.

As they started looking for options in child care, Karrmann found the options very limited. Farmington only has two daycare centers, and the rest are in-home.

Sitting together one day, she and her husband decided there should be more choices in daycare for families. They started jotting down the money involved.

"When we realized the costs involved, we realized this is no money-maker, by any means," Karrmann said. "So we asked ourselves, 'Is this something we really want to do?'"

The answer was, "yes."

Planning a dream

Karrmann first sought assistance from SCORE, a non-profit association that provides free and confidential business counseling and low-cost small business workshops and seminars through volunteers, many of whom are retired professionals. With their help, Karrmann was able to put together a business plan.

Then, Karrmann started looking at sites. Her first choice was a location in the industrial park, but the site was sold to another company.

An extensive search throughout the community followed. She met with developers of the Marketplace project on Pilot Knob Road, but there was limited space for a playground and many open doors and stores. She looked at purchasing the Farmington Lutheran Church building that is for sale, but the cost to upgrade it was too prohibitive. She considered pitching her business for the development coming to County Road 50 and Denmark Avenue, but that, too, was out of her price range.

After all, one of her goals in this daycare center is to provide child care services, but to do so at a reasonable cost. And as such, Karrmann wanted a nice site, but one not so expensive she would have to increase her prices to pay for the location.

Obstacles

Finding a site was just one of the hurdles Karrmann found herself jumping. When she tried to obtain financing, she sent inquiries to banks. No place would consider selling property until she had a bank lined up, but no bank would fall in place unless she had Small Business Association endorsements. Finally, she got the SBA approval, obtained financing and then went back to the Farmington Housing and Redevelopment Authority, still searching for a site.

There not being much land available in the community, the HRA started to look at the industrial park.

“There really were no other property suggestions given,” Karrmann said.

It was in the Industrial Park a possible site was found. Just a couple of things had to happen first. There was a 9 1/2 acre site there, which the city council recently split into three lots. With that possibility in mind, Karrmann chose one of the possible sites as a location for her daycare. Though the Industrial Park primarily houses industrial businesses, daycare facilities are allowed in the park with a conditional use permit.

Karrmann found out cost of building materials and, through that, her builder came up with Hardiplank, a exterior product made of 50 percent concrete and the rest sand and wood particles. The exterior covering, though, was not in the industrial park’s covenants as an acceptable material. As such, Hardiplank was reviewed by the HRA, the planning commission, and the city council. After months of debate, it was finally approved by the city council last week as an acceptable exterior material.

But there is still a ways to go. The city council was supposed to review the possible lot split at its June 16 meeting, but a fire in the office of the surveyor handling the lot split postponed the decision until July.

The long haul

Karrmann says the process has been tough, with so many roadblocks coming up along the way. At first, she said, she did not get a lot of direction in how to proceed with the project, and working with the city seems to be a lot different than working with a private developer.

“I’m not sure how you would know these things unless you get help along the way, which I am now, but if I had gotten more help earlier, I think I would have done better,” Karrmann said. “I’m not sure I was taken seriously at first.”

In order to be taken seriously, she spent several thousand dollars to have an attorney draw up a purchase agreement for the property. Just a letter of her intent was not enough, she said. And still, that agreement has not been either approved or denied.

She is encouraged the Housing and Redevelopment Authority has endorsed the project and the lot split so the project can go through. The HRA also wanted to see the lot split so it can sell the other two pieces of property that would be made available. The HRA has been unable to sell the entire 9 1/2 acres, because it includes a pipeline easement running through it.

And Karrmann really wants to provide a service to the community, and feels she can by opening a daycare. It would be small, private, and a “local service that knows local people and wants to be involved with the community and their daily lives.”

By opening a daycare in the Industrial Park, Karrmann thinks she could give parents who work in the park the opportunity to spend more time with their children. For instance, having their kids nearby, they could come over and take lunch with their children.

Even if this project does not work out right now, Karrmann is not about to back down. Opening a daycare and helping families is too important to her.

“It’s wonderful to have these people put their trust in you and you can actually help raise their children,” she said. “I’m not

backing down. I'm not going anywhere. This is what I'm here to do."

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