

# CT's Deli Feeds Northwoods Foodies

Since CT's Deli opened in Rhinelander, people are eating charcuterie with their craft beer and taking cooking lessons.

Life and business partners Rhonda Jicinsky and "Chef Tom" Jordens met while employed at a northern Wisconsin resort as its manager and chef. After seven years there, they knew they wanted to start their own business. But how to keep the pace manageable?

## Daytime dining in the land of the supper clubs

In early summer 2014 the couple came up with an answer: a fast-casual restaurant, open daytime hours. But Tom had doubts. "After my first restaurant failed, my position was 'never again.' But the more we researched our idea, the more we realized—current trends were working in our favor."



*"I was working full-time but I completed our business plan—My SBDC counselor baby-stepped me through it."*

— Rhonda Jicinsky

To open in time for the next summer's tourist season, the couple needed to start writing a business plan. In October, Rhonda spotted an announcement for an entrepreneurial training class being offered by the SBDC UW-Stevens Point in Rhinelander. When she enrolled, she had no idea she would be assigned a counselor. Center director Mary Westcott provided research, feedback, and motivation. Rhonda was still employed full-time through the holiday season, but with Mary's help, completed the plan by March 2015. "The hardest part was making the financial projections, but Mary baby-stepped me through it," Rhonda said.

Finalizing a location was difficult. Rhonda and Tom wanted to be in downtown Rhinelander, but once they finally located a suitable property, a difficult seller complicated the purchase.

Finding funding was also a challenge. The couples' jobs at the resort ended in March, which increased the pressure to open the new business as soon as possible. "In the class, we were told no bank would give money for a restaurant," Rhonda said, "so I never even considered going to my bank." The couple



considered a home equity loan. On a friend's suggestion they met with a local bank trying to grow in the small businesses market—and soon Rhonda and Tom a loan and a line of credit.

## An exceptional pairing of talent and industry experience

According to Mary, Rhonda and Tom brought an exceptional pairing of talent and industry experience. "Because of that, they were able to get the most out of their entrepreneurial training. They had a clear vision, were up-to-date on trends, and they knew their Northwoods target market with its year-round residents as well as the seasonal tourists," she said.

CT's Deli opened in early summer 2015 in a historic building, where an outdoor patio creates an intimate experience and talking to the chef is encouraged. "The open kitchen was an adjustment, but it turned out fine," Tom said. "I can interact with the customers as they enjoy with food. When they say 'that's the best sandwich I've ever had,' that's all the reward I need."

## Popular with Baby Boomers

The daytime dining concept has been popular with Rhinelander's Baby Boomers. "They're retired or working part-time. They eat any time, and enjoy a beer or a glass of wine. But by 7 or 8pm, everyone wants to be home," Rhonda observed. CT's Deli also offers cooking classes and wine events.

CT's Deli is a family endeavor: Tom's son helped get the restaurant ready to open, and now works full time in the kitchen. Tom's teenage daughter also works in the business. The founders plan to stay small, so they can stay in touch with their customers' changing tastes.

The SBDC entrepreneurial training program was crucial. "Rhonda worked hard on the financials to understand every decision's impact on cash flow," Mary said. At the end of the first year, Rhonda's one-year forecasts were only slightly off—"I was \$7,000 over on my sales," Rhonda said.

## At a glance

Name: CT's Deli  
Location: Rhinelander  
Year founded: 2015  
Employees: 5  
Website: cheftomsdeli.com  
WI SBDC at UW-Stevens Point,  
715-346-4609:

## Success stories from



Wisconsin Small Business  
Development Center  
wisconsinsbdc.org  
608-263-7812

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## CT'S DELI

Accomplishments with the SBDC of UW-Stevens Point:

- Business plan
- Financial projections
- QuickBooks setup

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