

Town of Oak Island  
Business Bulletin's

# MEET THE OWNERS

## *Dunes Mercantile* *Gifts and Guitars*

One never really knows the road that life will take you down, and the journey you will travel to arrive at a place that says the adventure was well worth it. Denny and Jackie Del Prete, owners of Dunes Mercantile Gifts and Guitars were both born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA. Growing up, they believed they would stay in the area and grow old in the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania. But as life happens, twists and turns and opportunities sent them on an adventure they never imagined.

Denny grew up in a musical family and started playing drums at the age of twelve. As a teenager, he worked in music stores and fell in love with everything musical, especially guitars. As it was the 1960's and The Beatles were all the rage, Denny was in the right place at the right moment. His wealth of knowledge regarding guitars and all musical instruments, stem from this time period in his life. While continuing to play drums in local bands, Denny ventured into advertising sales for The Pittsburgh Post Gazette, eventually becoming sales manager and editor for the Business News & Industry Page. After the sale of paper, Denny would land at a local radio station in advertising sales, never realizing how this decision would forever change his life and send him on an adventure of a lifetime.

Jackie grew up in a family with four siblings and spent many a summer at the baseball field with her brothers and father who was a coach. But it was her mother's love of football that would make Jackie a



forever fan of the pigskin. At a young age, Jackie often attended snow blown Steeler games with her mother because no one else would sit in the cold with her. She still is an avid Steeler fan and Pitt fan, her alma mater. After graduation, life landed Jackie at a local Pittsburgh radio station in advertising sales. It was there that the person who was "never getting married", met Denny.

And so the adventure began, and the team of Denny and Jackie pooled their collective talents to open a side business in the 1990's called "Oh You Beautiful Doll", featuring collectable dolls. The store was opened Thursday evening through the weekend and



the pair would open after their fulltime day jobs. While attending the Toy Fair trade show in New York, Denny found a supplier for high end signed sports collectibles. Upon returning home, the store became "Oh You Beautiful Doll & Sports Collectibles." It was a strange pairing, but it worked, offering something for everyone, male and female. This adventure would come back to revisit them one day!

Jackie's employment with Art Stone Theatrical lead to a promotion in South Florida where she was Executive Director of Operations in charge of the dance workshop and dance competition division. As the event coordinator, she booked venues, hotels, hired judges, staff, bought merchandise and traveled to events as director and MC. Denny went to work in advertising sales for the Miami Herald. As usual, Denny was in a local band and continued his musical adventure.

After 14 years in South Florida, Denny retired and the pair planned on joining Jackie's sister and brother-in-law in Wilmington, NC, a place they often visited and loved. However... eight months before Denny's retirement, Jackie's sister moved to the Southport area thus changing the adventure once again.

And here's where the BIG adventure begins! Retired Denny was bored and eventually found an outlet for his stained glass talent at a new store on Oak Island, Dunes Mercantile, which opened in 2018. Eight months later, in April of 2019, Denny was offered the opportunity to purchase the store. Jackie, still working and traveling, was not involved. At first glance, Jackie had some suggestions but did not want to get involved in the store. As with many people, 2020 changed their course and perspective and Dunes Mercantile began its evolution. Jackie, always a people person, realized she loved the interaction with the locals and visitors alike. She jumped right into her retail merchandise buying skills providing the store with new and unique products. Denny, meanwhile, returned to his roots and love of musical instruments by starting a section of guitars, drums, and accessories. If you connect the dots... it's the same thing that happened at "Oh You Beautiful Doll & Sports Collectibles". Without a definite plan in place, the store just evolved to what it was meant to be - Dunes Mercantile Gifts & Guitars!

Fast forward to 2024 and Dunes Mercantile Gifts & Guitars celebrated their 5 year anniversary! It would not be



possible without the support of the amazing local community and visitors that come back every year. They enjoy giving back to the community by supporting local organizations like SOAR and Sea Biscuit Wildlife plus donations to many local fundraisers. Jackie serves as Vice President of Business Development on the Southport/Oak Island Chamber of Commerce, the Oak Island Business Advisory Board and their neighborhood HOA board. To quote them both, "This is an amazing area where we live and we are so appreciative every day of landing here. Our aim is to make everyone have a great adventure on their visit to our store and the entire Oak Island community. We always recommend the local businesses and spread the word of what a wonderful place this is for locals, visitors and businesses alike.

Upon a visit to Dunes Mercantile Gifts & Guitars, one is greeted with a warm hello as the customer finds their head spinning to take in all the awesome merchandise. Lots of jewelry, candles and unique beachy décor...all at great prices! That is a staple at Dunes Mercantile Gifts & Guitars as locals and visitors always remark how the prices are great! Another highlight of the store is the stained glass artwork by Denny. He has made numerous windows and specialty projects for local customers and businesses and was recently honored with a banner award from Up Your Arts which features his stained glass art and hangs in the streets of Southport.

Customers ask about how the gift store added on a guitar store and love the story. Both divisions of the store have their own clientele but often cross over to both departments. Live music is often the norm when musicians come to try out an instrument and Denny jumps behind the drum set. Customers love the vibe and can be seen dancing their way through the store with metal artwork in one hand and wooden carved turtles in the other. The Del Prete's feel their adventure of life has come full circle and placed them exactly where they were meant to be. As their store (and life!) slogan says: "It's always an adventure at Dunes!"



*This series is an initiative of the Town of Oak Island Business Advisory Board. Please visit [OakIslandNC.gov/BAB](http://OakIslandNC.gov/BAB) to learn more.*

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