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Business

Welcome to the Southern Illinoisan Business section webpage! This weekly feature is a supplement to the Business section of our paper, and is updated every Sunday.

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HERRIN MAN SUCCEEDING WITH ROSSI'S MART

BY JOHN D. HOMAN, THE SOUTHERN

HERRIN - Luis Rossi knows a thing or two about hard work. For six years, he was manager of the tool and die engineering department at the now-closed Herrin Maytag plant.



When Rossi learned that the plant was eventually going to close, he took matters into his own hands and invested his hard-earned cash last year into a full-service gas station and convenience store in Cobden now called Rossi's Mart.

Luis Rossi, owner and operator of Rossi's Mart, has opened a new business in Herrin that will be very similar to the one he opened in Cobden 15 months ago. PAMELA KAY SCHMALENBERGER / THE SOUTHERN

Two weeks ago, he also assumed ownership of the former Veach service station in Herrin. It is also called Rossi's Mart.

"It was difficult in the beginning, but I really wanted to stay in the

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area," said Rossi, who resides in Herrin. "I didn't borrow money from anybody to open this business. I used my own."

Rossi said his Cobden station is open from 5 a.m. to midnight seven days a week. His Herrin business is open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The Cobden location, he said, is a full convenience store that also offers breakfast,

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lunch and dinner selections.

"I like cooking Italian food," Rossi said.

The Herrin business eventually will offer a snack bar, but is not designed for a full-service convenience store. What the Herrin shop offers that Cobden doesn't is vehicle service.

"We do oil changes, brake repairs and auto detailing," Rossi said. "Our goal is to satisfy our customers. Whatever we can do to keep them happy and keep them coming back we will try to do."

Jerry Watkins worked for 18 years at Maytag. He was plant manager when the business closed.

"A few of us had the opportunity to move with the company, but we chose to stay here," Watkins said. "I've lived in Herrin all my life and didn't want to leave."

On Jan. 1, Watkins opened Boondock's, a welding and machine shop that specializes in making farm equipment. He also owns a patent on a farm implement - a front inload brush rake, which he refers to as Terra Tooth. Watkins said he came up with the idea when he was digging out a pond on his property one day and was attempting to move the mud and break it up.

Watkins employs nine workers for now, all of them former Maytag employees, and hopes to add another 30 to 40 in a few months as the business grows.

"It's taken a lot of work and a lot of my own money to get this project going, but it's going pretty well," Watkins said. "The Bank of Herrin has also been a big help. They provided me with the loan to get our business off the ground."

Watkins said he and his business partner, John Miller, who is also his brother-in-law, are working virtually every day to help make the business a success.

"We're putting in a lot of hours, but we're very excited about the possibilities," Watkins said. "We've got some wonderful clients like Bombardier, Circuit City and the Mine Specialty company. Little by little, we're growing the business."

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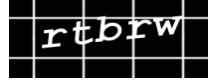
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