

## SHOPPING

# Guiding a Lifestyle

*Lewisburg's Serenity Now Outfitters is selling more than just outdoor gear.*

**T**echnically Craig Miller sells outdoor gear and apparel to nature enthusiasts: hiking boots, activewear, fishing poles, kayaks—that kind of thing. But since he opened his store, Serenity Now Outfitters, Craig has realized he's doing more than that. "We're not just selling a product, we're selling a lifestyle," he says. "We're not just a store, we're a mindset." Craig is good at selling that lifestyle because it's the lifestyle he leads himself. He's not just an entrepreneur—he's a fisher, hiker, dog owner, and lover of the outdoors.

Craig opened Serenity Now in 2003, a few years after he graduated from West Virginia University with a degree in wildlife ecology. He'd been planning on going to law school to pursue a career in environmental law, but a few weeks before he was set to start classes he got cold feet. "When a lot of my relatives and friends who are lawyers, people who had been pushing me toward that goal, started to tell me I shouldn't go if I wasn't sure it was what I wanted to do—that's when I knew I couldn't go to law school," Craig says. He



briefly considered business school, but in the end decided to skip straight to opening his own business instead.

"I felt like I had a good head on my shoulders," he says. "And the niche was here, waiting to be filled." He opened his new store in Lewisburg, just 50 miles from Beckley where he grew up, because of its thriving business community and vibrant, outdoorsy culture. Plus a nearby stream, Second Creek, is one of Craig's favorite places to fly-fish in the state—he wanted to do guided fly-fishing tours there in addition to the retail business. "I love that area so much and there was no one doing that on that stream," he says. These days Serenity Now offers a wide variety of guided fly-fishing tours on streams throughout West Virginia and Virginia, plus some extended two-day trips in Tennessee.

By 2005, just two years after it opened, the business had outgrown its original location on the edge of town, and Craig moved Serenity Now into a historic building downtown, doubling the retail space. Craig is so happy in that storefront he says he can't imagine he'd ever move again, so he tries to be really smart about the products he keeps in stock in that space—he wants to be a one-stop shop for outdoor enthusiasts before they head off on their next adventures. "We try to be diverse," he says. "We want to be really good at outfitting in this very small niche." The store has an especially large section of



fishing gear but also carries gear for hiking, backpacking, and camping, among other things, and customers often comment on how well-stocked it is. Many of Serenity Now's regulars check back often just to see what's new in the store—and to hang out with Craig and his dog, a golden retriever named River. "He's very popular," Craig says. "River's like our mascot."

#### SERENITY NOW

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