

A flan-tastic addition Vt. Flannel Co. comes to Manchester



STEWART CAIRNS — VERMONT NEWS & MEDIA

Matt Bigalow, owner of Vermont Flannel in Manchester, puts up shelves Friday as he prepares the store for opening.

By **TORY RICH**
Manchester Journal

MANCHESTER — Temperatures are finally dropping in Vermont. If you're looking for a fashionable way to stay warm this winter, the Northshire now has another option for you, and it's about as "Vermont" as it gets.

The Vermont Flannel Co.'s pop-up store at 426 Depot St. opened its doors Saturday morning. The business' temporary site next to Talbot's doesn't have much in the way of making its location known just yet, besides a flannel blanket in the window and the conspicuous, plaid-patterned vehicle affectionately known as the "flan van" in the parking lot.

Even on just its soft opening Saturday, though, the reputation of the 100 percent American-made company seems to precede it.

"We're here, and we've had a pretty brisk day," said Matt Bigalow, president and chief operating officer of Vermont Flannel Co. "We're really going to be advertising and promoting the grand opening for Friday."

One of the company's original claims to fame is that its founders, Mark and Linda Baker, were the first to sell flannel "loungewear." By the time you read this, you'll find a lot more on the store's shelves. In addition to pajama pants, the store sells long-sleeve shirts, robes, T-shirts, blankets, and even some dog clothing and accessories.



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Don Benasich, a consultant, left, and Suzanne Lees, a retail associate, right, prepare for the opening of Vermont Flannel.



The "Flan van" parked outside Vermont Flannel Company's pop-up business at 426 Depot St. in Manchester.

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store offers 10 percent off their stadium blankets.

"All our stuff is handmade in Vermont," Bigalow said. "We're using domestic manufacturing, and we're not a big-box retailer that can discount 40, 50, 60 percent and all these crazy Black Friday deals. That's not our business."

"Quite frankly for what

it is, it's very reasonably priced," he added. "American-made shirts, pants, blankets ... everything's under \$100."

Bigalow also said that the new Manchester base of operations will maintain the same hours for Black Friday and the entire holiday shopping season, which will be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, except 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. The temporary site will be operating until the end of January to hopefully bring some skiers into the fold, and for post-holiday returns.

"It's important we're still

here after Christmas to support refunds and exchanges," Bigalow said. "There's nothing worse than going back to a pop-up store, and you want to change sizes, and the sign's gone, and it's an empty space. We don't want to give customers that experience."

Bigalow, who took over the business with two partners in April, is cautious to avoid expanding too quickly but is excited to be opening Vermont Flannel Co.'s sixth store, spreading its footprint to what will be the company's southernmost location.

"Manchester is a nice next step for us," Bigalow said. "We seriously looked at five locations across New England, a handful outside of Vermont. ... Manchester was just really good to us. The [town] was good to us, the space was great, great staff. It all just really clicked."

Regarding where Vermont Flannel Co. will reside permanently in Manchester, Bigalow said all of its locations up north — in Woodstock, Ferrisburg, Johnson, East Barre and on Church Street in Burlington — are significantly smaller than the 426 Depot venue. He said they'll likely seek something closer to those in size.

"This store is — I'd estimate — about 30 to 40 percent larger than our next biggest store. ... We'll likely look around for something a bit smaller," he said. "It all comes back to growing responsibly. We don't want to bite off more than we can chew."