

The Coffee Co.



Owner: Sarah Sand
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(Web site in progress)
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People have strong opinions about how they like their coffee. And they get attached to their favorite coffee shops.

Take Sarah Sand. She worked at The Coffee Company in Grand Forks for three years while going to college. She knew all the regulars. Then, she'd get her java to go when she graduated and got her first career job. One day, just a couple years out of college, Sarah heard that The Coffee Company was closing. That was April of 2007. By May first, she was the new owner! "I never dreamed of owning my own business. I thought I'd be a dietician. But the opportunity arose and I took it," Sand says.

Sarah had been managing a privately-owned weight loss franchise, so she knew some bankers with the Chamber of Commerce. They referred her to the Small Business Development Center, who helped her put together a business plan and get a loan from Alerus Financial. "I knew Kellen Utecht with the Grand Forks SBDC since college, so he

helped me with the financial projections. I'd never taken an accounting or business class in my life," Sarah says. Her silent partner also provided her with a valuable resource--assets. Her fiancé at the time, Shane, is a farmer and was able to co-sign Sarah's loan. They are now young (24), married, with a year-old baby named Spencer. Sarah remarks, "The coffee business has totally changed my life. It's a long-term commitment to me, my family and the community."

It hasn't all been a bed of roses. Starting a coffee business in May, when college was ending and the weather was warming up, meant a couple of slow months. Sand says, "It was hard to figure out an adequate budget and projections at first. We didn't know what to expect. There was also some construction on our main road, which impacted the business. We had a hard start up, but no long term fears. We have lots of hopes and dreams!"

Ah, the innocence of youth—the energy—the excitement! But Sarah and Shane have fires in their bellies and lots of plans. New equipment, remodeling, and a Web site to further market the wholesale side of the business--coffee bean roasting. Sarah wants to provide signature coffees to Grand Forks businesses like banks, clinics, and small shops like hers. She also plans to open a kiosk or two in Grand Forks called Coffee Co to Go. From there, perhaps more coffee shops and kiosks in other cities will be created.

For today, she's content being an entrepreneur, wife and mother. She employs 10-14 high school and college students, depending on the time of year. Her experienced manager, Dianne Haugen, does the ordering and inventory. And Sarah gets to chat with the regulars and roast 40-50 types of specialty beans for special clients. Because coffee drinkers are very particular about how they like their java!

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