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White River Canoe Co. changes hands

New owner, 3 sons to add inner tubes, expand river trips

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The new owners of White River Canoe Co. plan to add inner-tube rides to the decade-old canoe and kayak business and utilize more of the river for trips in general.

Brian and Lesa Cooley bought the company this month from Steve and Lori Schwartz for \$165,000 and purchased about 4 acres at the launch site near Ind. 37 and 206th Street in Clare for \$215,000.

The business is open April through October.

This year, the Cooley family will add inner tubes to the mix, using a ramp just north of Potter's Bridge for the short trips. Ultimately, their plans are much larger.

"We will look for property as far north as the west side of Anderson," Brian Cooley said. "That will allow us an access point where people can kayak and canoe to the White River Campgrounds, rent a camp site and then canoe on down the next day."

He eventually plans to look for boat landings to the south of Noblesville but will concentrate to the north for the time being. "We like that upper portion because of the solitude," he said.

Cooley, an independent representative in the plastics industry, plans to operate the business with his three sons.

"They're all outdoors guys," Cooley said. "We hunt and fish together. We're a real close family, and my wife and I have always wanted to find something to get the boys in business locally."

Brian Cooley Jr., 20, a sophomore at Purdue, has worked at the business the past two summers and will run the day-to-day operations. Younger sons, Matt Cooley, a senior at Noblesville High School, and Andy Cooley, a sophomore, will help.

Brian Cooley Jr. said he noticed the business was for sale and pitched the idea of buying it to his father. "I have a lot of confidence with what we're going to do," Cooley Jr. said. "We can generate some good opportunities for growth."

Steve Schwartz, a county councilman, said his family will retain its 30-year-old bait shop and U-Haul rental business, and the land along the river just north of Logan Street. That site also served as the ending point for the canoe and kayak trips

The Cooleys will move White River Canoe Co.'s base of operations from Schwartz's site to the public launch just north of there, and utilize that as an ending point for river trips. They still will launch canoes and kayaks from the same Clare, White River Campground and Lafayette Trace Park sites.

The Schwartzs couldn't put as much time into the business as the Cooleys expect to. "This is bittersweet for Lori and I," Steve Schwartz said. "The business did very well, and it was not a situation where we had to sell it. It's just a matter of we work a lot of hours, and we decided we'd like to have a little more free time."

For Schwartz, finding the right buyer was more important than anything else. The county councilman has long been involved with efforts to clean and preserve the river. He believes the Cooley family will care for the river as carefully.

"We're very interested in not only making a living off the river but also taking care of it," Schwartz said. "That's very important for Lori and I. We will maintain a big attachment to the river, and we wanted to make sure we found someone with the same passion to take care of it."
