

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

BY PAMELA BROWN

Photography by LARS BLACKMORE

Stateline Sports Continues its Legacy

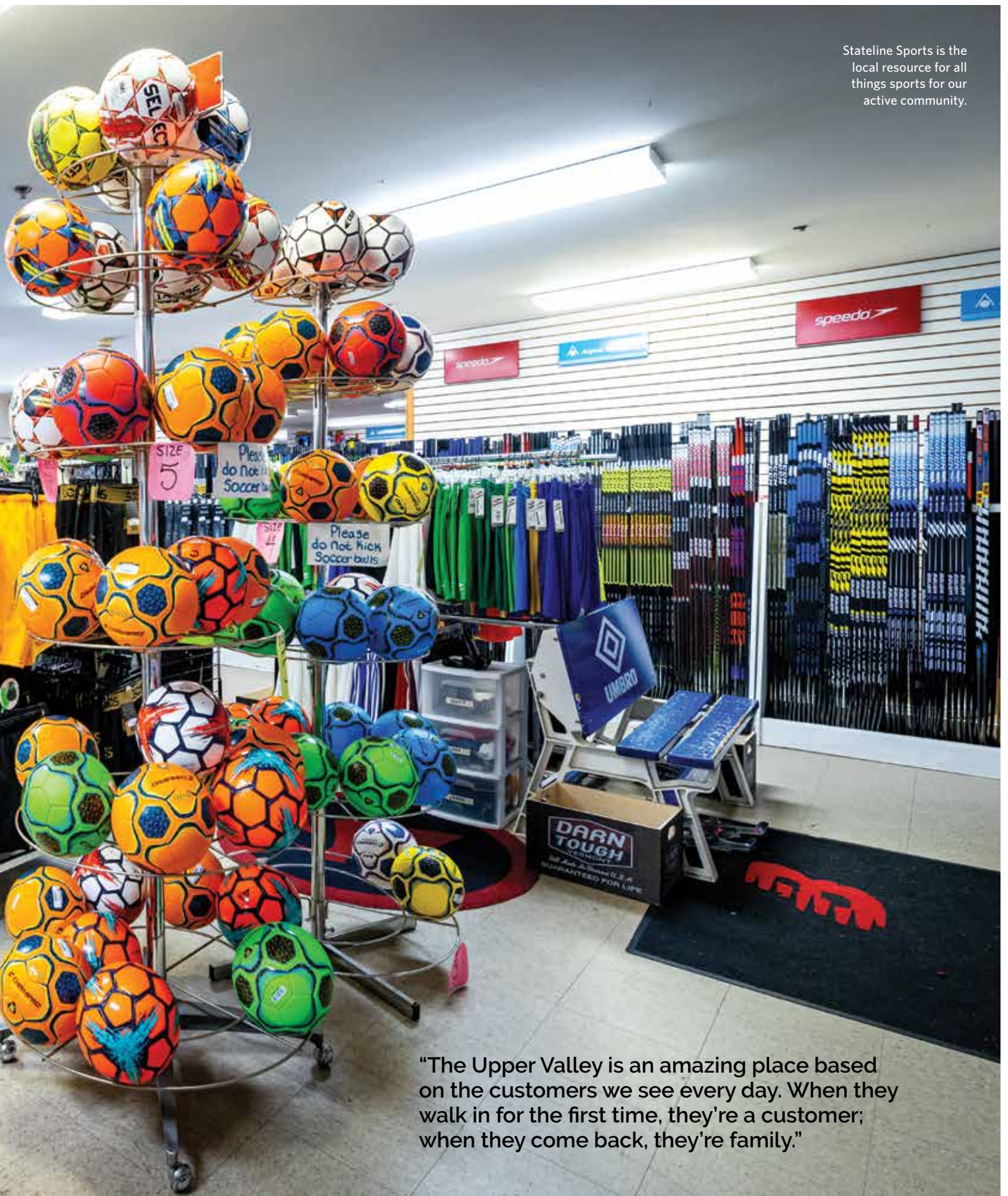
LOYAL TO CUSTOMERS, THE BUSINESS, AND THE COMMUNITY



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"The Upper Valley is an amazing place based on the customers we see every day. When they walk in for the first time, they're a customer; when they come back, they're family."

A SUPPORTIVE COACH, A DEPENDABLE STAFF, AND A STRONG GAME PLAN. These elements of a successful team epitomize Stateline Sports. “If you put the customers first, hire good people, and offer good products at a reasonable price, it’s a pretty good formula,” says owner Jon Damren, who has taken a step back from the business with faith in the quality and knowledge of his longtime staff. “They’re the face of the business and I’m happy to be in the background. I feel more confident every day that the business, however it moves forward in the long term, is going to continue,” he says. “My time on the front lines has passed, but I’m happy to be turning the reins over to very competent people who will continue to take care of the customers in our region.”





Clockwise from top: Customers walk through the newly designed ice hockey department at Stataline. Bob sharpens a pair of ice skates. Zach greets another customer entering the store. A customer looks through the vast selection of shoes and socks at Stataline. Dave explains the differences between shoe choices for a customer.



Opposite: Bud assists a customer trying on a new pair of Hoka running shoes.



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One of those staff members is Dave Dupree, store manager and footwear buyer, and 33-year employee. “There’s no hesitation for anybody to step up. Since day one we’ve felt a connection to the place and we’re trying to build toward the future,” says Dave. “We’re lucky to have found a core group of people who care, who have morals and ethics, and who help every customer to the best of their ability.”



VARIETY AND EXPERTISE

Jon describes Stateline as a hardware store for sporting goods. “We’re able to respond to customer needs and fill special orders. The staff members have all been cross-trained and are so good at educating customers,” he says. “My staff works tirelessly to locate the right product and have it in the store.”

Established in 1983 in West Lebanon, Stateline Sports carries a huge selection

of quality sporting-goods for both men and women, from basic to top-of-the-line, covering every seasonal sport. Ice hockey is a large department showcased in the main showroom. “We have employees here who have worked with hockey equipment for 30 to 40 years and we make sure customers get a good fit for their performance and safety. Once winter really sets in, pond skating becomes a big Upper Valley pastime. We sell a lot of ice skates for all ages. Kids’ skates adjust and some recreational skates are as comfortable as sneakers,” notes Dave.

Footwear is another big department. “It’s nice to be able to offer the customer a wide array of quality choices and accommodate them.” Name brands include Hoka, ASICS, New Balance, Brooks, and newer ones including Altra and Topo. Stateline also has pop-up Team Stores for equipment and apparel.

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Clockwise from top:

All sports are in season at Stateline Sports. Swimsuits and accessories are available year-round. Hoka running shoes, one of many great brands available at Stateline.



BUILDING A BUSINESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Jon opened Stateline with his friend Bob Vanier, whom he had worked with for five years at Tommy Keane Sports. When Tommy Keane retired and dissolved the company, Jon and Bob opened Stateline in 1983, which started as a small running shop since Bob was a successful marathon runner. The store grew gradually, added categories, and expanded its space. The two friends worked together until Bob's passing in 2011 when Jon became sole owner. "I was able to change the staff's level of responsibilities and reallocate duties within the company. It gave each person an opportunity to grow and take on more responsibility, which they were more than ready and able to do," he explains. Most of the staff has been with Stateline for 25 to 38 years. "At no time was I alone. Our staff is incredible. It was not at all about me—it was a team and what we were able to do during a challenging time."

Growing up in West Lebanon, Jon appreciates being part of the community. "We've been active in supporting organizations over the years. We've sponsored road races and a lot of different activities with schools." All of Stateline's employees are avid sports enthusiasts. "We have a lot of soccer players, runners, walkers. Our hockey manager plays hockey two or three times a week. Everybody that works here was probably an athlete at the high school or college level and they have a good understanding of the market," he says.

For Dave, the store environment is inspiring. "The Upper Valley is an amazing place based on the customers we see every day. When they walk in for the first time, they're a customer; when they come back, they're family," he says, comparing Stateline to the classic TV show *Cheers*. "You can get your gear and shoes but also figuratively pull up a stool and just chat with friends and family."



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Jon also cherishes the relationships he's made. "I've met so many people from all walks of life who've come through the door. The people I've met are incredible. It's not just the high-profile people, it's the everyday relationships. When you're a small-town business like we are, you really get to know the parents and the kids and you watch them grow up. It's made it all worthwhile," he says.

With Stateline approaching 40 years, Jon knows his staff will continue to operate the business in the way that its philosophy has always been—understanding the customer is the lifeblood of the business. "I'm proud how they've embraced everything we've discussed and I've asked of them. They're so loyal to the business and the customers," says Jon.

Dave is thankful for Jon's mentorship. "Jon has been fantastic. Since the beginning, we know whether he's here or in the background, he's supportive of decisions we make because everything is for the betterment of the business and our customers," says Dave. "Both Jon and Bob had a business that was run like a family. Even though none of us that are here now are blood related, we've been together long enough where we are family, and we enjoy being with each other and the customers." **1**

Stateline Sports

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