

New Anchor owner brings experience and excitement

By Alison Ahlgrim
Special to the Reporter

After 22 years of owning and managing The Anchor, John and Dawn Kinnett officially turned operations over to new owners Kevin and Debbie Brown on Sept. 13.

"There are so many emotions that we have been feeling before, during and after the sale. The Anchor has been our baby for so long, it almost feels like you do when you watch your kid leave for college. You feel a little lost—not knowing what to really do because you

dedicated yourself to it.

We will still be around and part of this great community," wrote the Kinnetts on The Anchor's Facebook page.

Despite the sadness involved with turning over a long-time business, both Brown and Kinnett are excited for the possibilities that lie ahead for The Anchor, which for many years was known as The Anchor Inn. "John left us with an incredible staff and an incredible business. We are excited to take this space to the next level and put into action the things John envisioned

when he rebuilt [after the 2014 fire]," said Brown.

With 30 years of experience in the entertainment and hospitality business, Brown is looking forward to putting all his ventures together in one location. He and his wife have owned multiple businesses in multiple locations in the past, but the size of The Anchor will allow them to combine music, entertainment, banquet hall rentals, food and a bar together under one roof.

Brown has a 90-day plan to

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The deck and concert stage at The Anchor.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Brown

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start with research and development, followed by rolling out schedules and packages for the banquet hall and party deck, updating the website to be more user-friendly, creating two separate menus for the restaurant and bar, switching some of the beer taps over to popular craft beer brands and creating covered space on the deck for three-season access.

With its prime location near the interstate, Brown anticipates being a hub for commuters between Madison and Rockford. He also hopes to bring comedians, magic shows, paint nights and music into the

space.

Despite the coming changes, Brown also emphasizes his focus on maintaining the Kinnetts' legacy of a community-driven, family-friendly gathering place. In speaking with long-term customers, Brown has heard that many miss the "cozy spaces" available in the smaller building that burned down. To address this, he plans to "bring cozy areas back" by creating three or four smaller, more intimate performance spaces within the bar. These will include the Naughty Mermaid area and the boat-shaped stage located over the bar.

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Brown also wants long-term customers to know that "Fergy is still doing the meat raffle." This has been the number one question he received during the transition.

While the Kinnetts are looking forward to traveling and taking a break from the restaurant business, they will also be on hand to answer questions and help transition. "I've told John he can travel, but he has to be in a place with cell service," said Brown.

The Anchor will host a public event on Saturday, Sept. 23, at 5 p.m. to honor the Kinnetts' legacy and celebrate the future.