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Jerry Flynn, KV Bait Shop owner, scoops through a tank of bait. The shop will close for the winter Oct. 15 and Flynn will pursue his passion for trapping and hunting.

Bait shop owner hooked on wildlife

BY EMILY BATTMER
Staff Reporter

For some, making a living means slaving away at the office, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., watching the clock and waiting for the weekend. Outdoorsman and local bait shop owner Jerry Flynn is not that kind of guy. Instead, he's making his living as his own boss, running the KV Bait Shop located near campus on Davis Street.

The KV Bait Shop officially opened its permanent location on Davis Street in April of this year, Flynn said though he owned bait shops previously in a couple of other locations in town, they are now closed.

Flynn is the shop's sole owner and operator. He said his upbringing and his love for the outdoors were the driving forces behind his decision to follow this career path, even though it was a jump from his previous position as a foreman and manufacturer at a 600-person Wire Rope Corporation of America plant.

He said going from a steady paycheck to being his own boss

was a lifestyle adjustment, but was well worth it.

"I make my whole living outdoors now," he said. "It's a lot more fulfilling, totally being out on my own, answering to nobody, spending most of my time with or in the outdoors."

Flynn said his decision to leave the plant four years ago was a good one. He said that while Kirksville is in a relatively central location for fishing, there isn't another bait shop for 35 miles — at least not one that sells the variety of bait that he does, including worms, minnows and sunfish.

He said the shop is especially busy in April, May and June, and settles down in late July and August, when temperatures rise. Business picks up again in September, he said, during the "second bite" when crappie and catfish make their pre-winter run. Then he said it's time to close the shop for winter on Oct. 15 and do what he really loves: trap and harvest fur.

"That's my primary love. [The bait shop] just keeps me occupied in the summer," he said.

In an average year, Flynn said he'll catch 600 to 800 raccoons, 30 to 40 bobcats and otters and 200 to 250 beavers. Flynn said last year alone, he caught 1,274 muskrats and 205 mink and fox. He said he spends most of his time in the woods during the winters. He travels to states like North Dakota, Mississippi and New Mexico, trapping fur-bearing animals and selling them to wholesalers, like the North American Fur Auctions.

Flynn said he began trapping at 12 years old, when he caught his first muskrat in Spur Pond. He was born in the small nearby town of Livonia, Mo., where he said he was influenced early by his father, who loved hunting deer and pheasants. Flynn said it was during a pheasant hunting trip to Iowa that he caught a glimpse of his first trap,

stationed in a creek. He asked his father what it was, and Flynn said this early memory has stuck with him ever since — the up-close-and-personal method of trapping intrigued him.

"You can shoot a rifle from 200 yards away, but [when trapping,] you really have to zero in on the animal and know its characteristics, more than when hunting," he said.

Flynn isn't the only Kirksville outdoorsman who enjoys hunting and fishing. David Schutter, Truman State's head wrestling coach, shares a similar passion for the hobby. Flynn said Schutter is one of his regular customers, stopping by the bait shop about twice a week during the summer to purchase minnows and sunfish. Like Flynn, Schutter said his love for the outdoors can be traced back

to childhood memories of fishing with his father.

"I started hunting and fishing growing up as the youngest of four boys," Schutter said. "My older brothers learned to hunt and fish from our dad and our grandfathers. In that time period of my life, our family hunted, trapped and fished to keep food on the table."

While hunting, trapping and fishing can create cherished memories and serve as a means of survival, Flynn said the tradition doesn't always make him popular with those who don't come from rural backgrounds and raise ethical questions about hunting.

"Contrary to what most people believe about fur hunters and fishermen, I love wildlife," Flynn said. "It does have to be maintained. A lot of people think that hunting and trapping is cruel, but we don't hold a candle to Mother Nature. There's no fast way to die in nature."

Flynn said he can't imagine having any other lifestyle. His experiences trapping and harvesting fur and running a bait shop have been nothing but rewarding.

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— Jerry Flynn
KV Bait Shop owner



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Left, KV Bait Shop owner Jerry Flynn holds worms commonly used for bait. Above, his son Keaton holds a leech used as bait.