

New local store Big Bear Gear meets growing demand for outdoor adventure
MercerMe Community Contributor JULY 9TH, 2020



Though many retail establishments have now re-opened, coronavirus still poses a major concern in the State of New Jersey. Social distancing is still required and large gatherings are seen by many to be unsafe. In this environment, more and more families are increasingly turning to outdoor adventure as a way to enjoy the summer.

One newly opened shop by the name of Big Bear Gear seeks to meet this demand. Located just outside of Hopewell Township, Big Bear Gear sells a variety of outdoor equipment for both the beginner and expert in outdoor adventure.

Inside Big Bear Gear (Photo by Brian Chin)

Owners Rebecca Gelman and Dr. Michael Ehrenreich describe Big Bear Gear as "everything for the outdoors: camping, hiking, biking, kayaking, and fishing, you name it." This means you can buy sleeping bags, hiking shoes, camping gear, fishing equipment, and other types of outdoor gear at the shop. Located in the same location, The Black Sheep is a gift shop started by the couple that "sells gifts, curiosities, novelties, and souvenirs." If you want to create a lasting memory of your experience exploring the outdoors, you can buy anything ranging from earrings to books at The Black Sheep.

On a different note, Big Bear Gear is also known for its kayak and bike rentals, which are available to anyone who goes to the shop.

"The easiest way to rent a kayak or bike is online. You can go to [the Big Bear Gear website](#), pick what bike and kayak you want, and notify us of the date and time. Alternatively, you can call us and complete the rental process at the shop," Ehrenreich says.

However, Ehrenreich warns visitors that kayaks and bikes are limited because "everyone is getting outdoors this year." He cautions, "If you're driving an hour from Brooklyn, we can't guarantee we'll have four kayaks for you. Thus, it's always best to book in advance."

Later on, Big Bear Gear is also planning to offer instructions on outdoor travel and group tours. "A big part of our plan here is to provide experience. We plan to give both instructions for various activities (kayaking, biking, hiking, fishing) and group experiences. Once COVID-19 is behind us, we'll take you down the river and we'll bring in somebody to talk about the fauna, flora, and geology," the couple said.

"Opening a business during the coronavirus pandemic has been hard," describes Gelman. "We don't know how many people are not coming out," says Ehrenreich , "and everything is in short supply, so it's been hard getting contracts with suppliers."

However, despite the challenges, Michael and Rebecca are hopeful for the future of both the Big Bear Gear and The Black Sheep. They plan to use their business as a way of creating more interest in the natural surroundings of Mercer County and supporting the community. The couple have said they will help organizations such as the the Sourland Conservancy, Delaware River Keeper, and the Watershed Institute host events at the shop. They're also committed to supporting local farmers by organizing farmstands at their location to showcase local produce.



"We've really drawn a lot of people into the area from places you wouldn't expect including New York, Philadelphia, and Connecticut. Ultimately, we want to continue to help people better experience the outdoor possibilities this area has to offer."

To learn more about Big Bear Gear and The Black Sheep, visit <https://bigbeargearnj.com/> and <http://blacksheepnj.com/>.

Both shops are located on Route 29, just past the Golden Nugget Flea Market on the way to Lambertville.

Submitted by Brian Chin. Chin is a rising junior at Hopewell Valley Central High School. His favorite classes are math, computer science, and history. He's involved in Model U.N., Future Business Leaders of America, and robotics. Brian enjoys reading, hanging out with friends, and playing tennis in his free time.

Edited 7/22/20 to correct Dr. Michael Ehrenreich's name

Edited 7/24/20 to correct name of Sourland Conservancy's name

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