



Donna Jones/Sentinel

Rory Willis, left, and Hugo Aguirre are opening their new clothing shop on Freedom Boulevard in time for holiday shopping.

# Young entrepreneurs take a gamble on style

By LISA GROSSMAN

SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Two young entrepreneurs are defying the crippled economy and living a dream by opening a clothing store in Freedom.

"I understand the economy's down, but people still like to look good," said Rory Willis, 26, who opened Manish Ways & Co. last week with his friend Hugo Aguirre, 26. "We've been trying to do this for some time now. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so we just ran with it."

Willis said he was born in Santa Cruz, but moved to the Bay Area when he was 2. When he came back to visit, friends and relatives always commented on his style.

"The style in the Bay Area is different, more flashy," he said. "When I would come down here dressed a certain way, I'd get reactions. People would ask me, 'Where'd you get that? Could you get me one?'"

That inspired him to bring his style to Santa Cruz. He started selling clothes at the Santa Cruz flea market and on eBay. "I started realizing I could potentially do this all the time," he said. "I could make a business out of it."

A few months ago, he noticed a for lease sign in a storefront on Freedom Boulevard, a major thoroughfare dotted with shopping centers and strip malls. He and Agu-

irre decided to go for it.

"We used to always talk about what we could do and what we're capable of," Willis said. "It just takes some time and discipline. We decided to really pursue it."

Willis and Aguirre both went to high school in Santa Cruz County, but neither has any previous business experience. Willis worked as a care provider for elderly and disabled people for four years. Aguirre was a mortgage banker until last year, and currently coaches football at Monte Vista Christian School in Watsonville. They are financing the business entirely out of their personal savings, Willis said. So far they have invested about \$7,000.

The store, which is decorated with graffiti-style paint on the walls and floor, has a young, hip feel. They sell clothing, shoes, hats, CDs, movies and accessories. Prices range from a \$10 T-shirt to a \$150 jacket. Willis identified their style as somewhere between hip-hop and skater, but said they aim to appeal to all markets.

"We really want to be a one-stop shop, somewhere you could bring your girlfriend or the kids. We want everyone to be able to find something that grabs their attention, that could potentially be for them," he said.

At the moment, though, most of their merchandise is men's clothing, Willis said.

## Manish Ways & Co. Grand Opening

**WHERE:** 1910-A Freedom Blvd., Freedom.

**WHEN:** All day Dec. 13. Barbecue 1 p.m.-4 p.m., raffle drawing 7 p.m.

**STORE HOURS:** 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

**CONTACT:** E-mail manishways@yahoo.com.

The store carries famous national brands and small brands from the Bay Area, like custom painted shirts Kama 4K.

"It's something where people could come in and say 'Wow, I've never seen that before,'" Willis said. "There's nothing like this in Watsonville."

Manish Ways & Co. will have its grand opening on Dec. 13. The event will include a free barbecue, performances by Bay Area rappers including De'Juan Love and Squirrel, and a raffle.

Despite the poor economy, Willis is optimistic. He said if the business fails, he plans to keep renting the store space and live there until the economy turns around.

"I'm gonna do it, somehow, some way," he said. "I'll pretty much do whatever I have to do to make it work."

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