



Softball Fans Inc. of Kalamazoo is adding fast-ballers to the fold

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By **Al Jones** | **Kalamazoo Gazette**



Jonathon Gruenke / Gazette

Business is growing for Bryan Knoll, owner of Softball Fans Inc. The seller of baseball and softball equipment has acquired local fast-pitch softball training operation Worden's Softball Academy.

KALAMAZOO — Softball Fans Inc. has acquired Worden's Softball Academy and will expand at the Midlink Business Park in Comstock Township to accommodate it.

Softball Fans, which markets itself as the largest online retailer of high-end softball and baseball equipment, and which now operates a large training center, finalized an agreement on Thursday to acquire Worden's.

Worden's, a local softball training operation, will relocate from Oshtemo Township into the Softball Fans location in early April, said Bryan Knoll, owner of Softball Fans. Terms of the acquisition were not disclosed.

"With Kim, it was kind of a no-brainer," Knoll said of working with Worden's owner Kim Worden. "She has been in the area

for 32 years and for us to get that type of customer-base was kind of an easy decision."

He said Worden has an impeccable reputation and trains high-caliber players, which are the type that utilize the gear sold by his business.

Worden's is an 8-year-old business now at 6251 Technology Ave. (off 9th Street, near Swat Fitness and Bounceland). It will become a part of Softball Fans and Knoll said the addition will necessitate adding another 20,000 square feet of space to the room Softball Fans already has at Midlink, bringing its total footprint there to about 55,000 square feet.

Softball Fans, itself, just relocated in January from South Westnedge Avenue in Portage to Midlink.

"For me, personally, after doing this for 32 years, I am in this for the short-term," said Worden, a former player and coach at Western Michigan University who specializes in private training for pitching and hitting.

Worden will continue with the business as director of softball training and her staff of 15 will continue to serve their clientele of more than 350 area women and girls involved in fast-pitch softball.

Although she said she is at least two years away from hanging up her training cleats, Worden said, "I'm looking further ... and I wanted to make sure our staff, trainers and students have a home base to continue to do what they do and thrive. I did not want it (her business) to fragment in the next few years, with everybody going in different places in search of a home."

She said Knoll is a great businessman who found her as she was looking to transition her business into a larger space, and transition it for the future. Knoll said Worden's is a wonderful fit for with his growing operation.

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