

# New business moving into downtown offering fun, new trend

By HILLARY GAVAN Senior staff writer | Posted: Thursday, May 12, 2016 4:00 pm

BELOIT — Looking for something new to do on date night or for the kids' birthday party? All ages are invited to try the newest trend — live escape rooms.

[ESC] Quest opened at 412 E. Grand Ave. in early May. Owned by Steve and Vicki Hutchison, the business offers four live escape rooms where customers try to solve puzzles and find clues. If they solve the puzzle, they earn a key to escape. The rare 10-20 percent of people who can complete the task within 60 minutes get bragging rights and their name written on the “leaderboard” up front.

Live escape rooms are a growing trend in gaming. The concept was once played out on a computer app. However, many new businesses sprung up players wanted to do it live with real rooms and props. Vicki first saw the concept on reality shows.

“I started researching it and saw how it was trending across the country. I thought it would be something fun to do here in Beloit,” she said.

Vicki and Steve's daughter, Meghann Hutchison, who also is the business's human resources director, said the concept is fun and intergenerational. Although being locked in a room might sound intimidating to some, it's really an advanced puzzle game with extensive props.

“Just because you are locked in a room, it's not a scary experience. It requires you to use your brain for the element of entertainment,” Meghann said.

Vicki noted that anyone can get out, no questions asked, by simply pressing the buzzer.

For Vicki, who used to run entertainment websites for youngsters, plotting out elaborate mysteries in the rooms was a natural fit.

Customers can choose among four interactive rooms. In the first room customers work to find a



## [ESC] Quest

Meghann Hutchison, human resources director, stands in front of [ESC] Quest, a new business offering live escape rooms. Customers use clues and puzzles to solve a mystery in one of four available rooms. The entertainment is a growing trend across the country, and its owners Vicki and Steve Hutchison are eager to offer it to Beloit and beyond.

missing woman named Amelia Cooke. Visitors can rifle through a couch, her books, knitting and other props and cubbyholes to find clues including a combination to padlocks revealing even more clues.

In the mystery of the man cave, customers try to find missing keys via clues strewn in the bachelor pad. In the shady attorney's room people try to find his connection to organized crime before he leaves Croatia. Another room is home to a rookie detective who has botched a case. Vicki printed out real FBI most wanted suspects in her elaborate plot requiring customers fix the case.

"I wanted to make it as lifelike as possible," Vicki said.

Open seven days a week, the new business is ideal for a variety of outings including corporate team building exercises, birthday parties, reunions, date night, girls or guys nights and more.

The Hutchisons had to strip the walls down at their location as the space was formerly a clothing store. They decorated it with comic-book style quotations and little detective icons such as magnifying glasses.

One quote read, "A lock is meant to keep an honest person honest."