Despite the resources the area has to offer, some businesses struggle to be successful.

In 2008, two couples that enjoyed the outdoors and the river thought to fill an absence in local business offerings and start a canoe and kayak renting business. Sam and Jane Crowther of Marietta joined with high school friends Robin and Nina Rauch of Columbus opened Northwest Territory and Outfitters thinking there would be a large demand for the kinds of services they planned to offer.

“It went slow at first but picked up as the summer went. Advertisement went pretty much by word of mouth,” said Sam Crowther. Even though business picked up, the group decided to close up shop at the end of the summer with no plans to reopen the next year.

There were high hopes just before things really got started. An article from the May 28, 2008 issue of The Marietta Times quoted Robin Rauch saying “Many people don’t get the chance to see the river side of town, so we want to provide them with that opportunity.”

Rentals were done on the Harmar side of the Muskingum River. People would get in the water at the docks by the boathouses. For the most part, overhead costs were low since there wasn’t an actual brick and mortar store to pay rent on.
Unfortunately, it wasn’t as easy to make money as the group had hoped. The liability costs were fairly high. The initial investment in the boats was also quite large. There were also the costs of life preservers and oars.

Probably the biggest influence to close after the summer, though, was the time commitment the business required.

“The time factor was an issue. My wife was also opening a business of her own,” said Crowther, “That was the big drawback. We’d rather be out canoeing ourselves.”

The business had a “fire sale” at the end of the summer to sell the two canoes and 10 kayaks in order to break even. Ironically, Crowther found it was easier to sell the boats that weekend than rent them.

There is a market for this type of service in the area. Other businesses have offered rentals for a few summers and then discontinued due to some of the high costs associated with offering rentals.

Sam Crowther says he still gets calls today from people wondering if they can rent a canoe.

“They find the phone number somehow, so I think people had a good time with it.”

Wendy Wharff, executive director of the Marietta and Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, says they try to help new businesses as much as they can. “We encourage businesses to partner with the CVB and save through economy of scale on publications and flyers.”
Crowther thinks that if he had had more time to commit to the business over several years and be open five or six days a week in the summer, it probably would have made money.

If people are looking for a place to rent a canoe or kayak, they may be out of luck for the time being. The closest outfitter in Ohio is scheduled to open in Monroe County this Memorial Day Weekend.