

Bountiful gifts for shoppers browsing in Benzie County area

BY JOSHUA A. BRADLEY
Special to the Record-Eagle

Everybody knows that Benzie County is a great place to climb a sand dune, kayak a river, or hunt for morels. But this outdoor paradise is also fast becoming a shopper's paradise.

Three of its towns — Frankfort, Beulah and Benzonia — create a triangle of shopping opportunities that rival more populated counties. You won't find huge stores or endless aisles of merchandise there. But you will find unique, hand-crafted products that might be just right for those people on your list that seem to have everything. And in some cases, the person who sells you the product might very well be the artist who made it.

Frankfort

Frankfort, situated on Betsie Bay and Lake

Michigan, is the largest of these towns. It has many shopping opportunities throughout downtown, but especially along Main Street.

Northern Lights and Lifestyles offers a variety of quality home décor and gift solutions, with a specific focus on lighting accessories. Their products are a mix of periods and styles, including mission-style furniture, art, pottery, decorative tiles and other period accessories.

According to owners Ed and Shirley Wald, products in the store are limited in production, but one can still find everything from "a pair of hand-crafted earrings to a crystal chandelier."

"We're a small boutique store," Shirley Wald said. "Everything you see here is handcrafted because of its long-lasting quality."

She added, "The test of a good purchase is the longer you have it the more you love

it." Also along Main Street is Country Accents, a "store for every room in your home, including your garden and patio," said Marcia O'Neal, who owns the store with her husband, Fred.

The store offers everything from one-of-a-kind birdfeeders, to bake ware, hand-blown etched wine glasses and Christmas ornaments. They also specialize in lace.

The Bookstore, also on Main Street, is a small independent bookshop, but it's jammed pack with the latest best sellers, classics and greeting cards. A second location is in Beulah.

Beulah

Beulah sits on the shore of Crystal Lake, just off U.S. 31. Its main street, Benzie Blvd., has many shops that are open year-round.

Art-Cetera offers an eclectic mix of pottery, jewelry,

glass, wood, metal and woven products. She also carries aerial photos of the area.

Owner Connie Messina said that her goal is to offer "art for your heart and home."

"The holidays are a stressful time," said Messina. "Shopping in a small community keeps things at a quieter pace. And when you leave my store, you'll be all gift wrapped and ready to go."

Kitty Ely, owner of Northern Décor, stresses the uniqueness of her products, which range from purses, scarves and jewelry to more "woody, up north" products like lodge and cabin décor and garden accents.

Crystal Crate and Cargo, open since 1977, has "distinctive accessories for person and home," says its owner, who prefers to remain nameless because she wants to stress the shop's

community environment.

"Our store is a socially inclusive atmosphere," she said.

From wall to ceiling, the shop is filled with high-quality and long-lasting products, such as cookware and serving items. They say their mission is to find the best quality for the price.

Benzonia

The town of Benzonia is an art lover's dream. Home to "the gallery district," a stretch of U.S. 31 near M-115, the area is a great place to find original arts and crafts.

Vigland Gallery, owned by Alan and Susie Vigland, specializes in pottery, but also features paintings, prints, weavings and jewelry.

According to Alan Vigland, almost all of their products come from Michigan artists.

Another nearby gallery is Savannah Victoria. Owner Vickey Ramsey carries home

décor products there — "everything from shabby-chic to Victorian," she said.

This holiday season, Ramsey finds that shoppers are buying pampering gifts, like bath and body products and scented candles, over more extravagant gifts.

Benzie hospitality

Benzie County store owners agree that shopping locally has many benefits, often saying that they offer a more "personal touch."

Alan Vigland said the close proximity of the towns makes it easy to get around to all the shops without being stuck in traffic or trying to find a parking spot.

"Get a cup of coffee and shop," Messina said. "None of us have signs on our doors that say you can't bring in your coffee."

Joshua A. Bradley is a local freelance writer.

The gift of art: Special present that is timeless and comes in many varieties

BY CAROL SOUTH
Special to the Record-Eagle

What could be a more personal gift during the holiday season than a piece of original art?

Area artisans and businesses offer choices ranging from photography to furniture, ornaments to adornments. Purchasing a friend or loved one a piece of art sends a message that the recipient is special, said Sara Smith, owner of Evergreen Gallery on West Front Street in Traverse City.

"I know when I go on vacation I always look for hand-crafted gifts to bring home," said Smith.

The Evergreen Gallery offers items from more than 100 artists nationwide, including a number of local

artists.

Smith noted that she and partner Darla Raney sell art in a range of media, including pottery, wall tiles, watercolor paintings, dried flower arrangements, photography, glass items and jewelry.

"Traverse City is more traditional, functional, buyers want usable pieces — art for every day," said Smith.

Maurice (pronounced Morris) Hayden is squarely in the functional camp. He and wife Jackie opened Old World Gifts & Furnishings in Interlochen Aug. 1 to sell original Amish furniture, both rustic and fine, and accessories. Each piece is handmade by one of 96 different families he buys from in the Amish community in northern Indiana.

The 4,500-square-foot

showroom features bedroom sets, dining room sets, couches, recliners, gliders, hutches and entertainment centers. Customers can custom order these pieces in the woods and colors they desire with delivery in eight weeks.

This season, Hayden is seeing more optimistic shoppers, feeling that the economy is on an upturn. However, these customers still demand quality and most of all, utility.

"I don't think they're getting extravagant by any stretch of the imagination, they are still more utilitarian," said Hayden. "If they want to get more extravagant, they will buy something together like for the bedroom or a hutch for a Christmas present that they both can enjoy and have

been putting off buying."

The Jordan Valley Glass Works offers specialty items — from yard ornaments and Christmas tree decorations to five-foot chandeliers. The gifts are made on site by artisans. So far, big sellers this holiday season are old-fashioned lamps as well as snowman or ribbon-candy ornaments.

"Another trend for us this year is custom-made fish, that has really picked up this year," said Glenna Haney, co-owner of the glass works with Jay Bavers. "They might want us to match a color, but it is better to complement (a paint chip or wallpaper sample) because we can only match to a certain degree."

Starting her fifth holiday season since opening in May of 2000, Haney said that the

average shopper this time of year spends between \$200-\$300. While in recent years they may be buying more smaller ticket items, they are purchasing more of them.

"We have people coming in who are shopping for that last-minute decoration for the holidays," noted Haney of some shoppers who want their tree up and home decorated by Thanksgiving. "Right now we're getting a lot of husbands coming in a looking for their wives and after Thanksgiving we'll get a lot of couples buying for family members."

Boni Rickman at Rickman's Antiques has just the answer for furniture accessorizing dilemmas: small, fancy carved chairs.

"We like unusual pieces that have scenes on the

back," said Rickman, who has co-owned the business with her husband, Paul, for 16 years.

Functional gifts are also in demand at her store since people want to actually use their purchases.

"What's nice about furniture is that you're using it all the time, it's not just stuck in a cupboard and forgotten about," Rickman said.

Nostalgia is a big seller as people search for old-fashioned bubble lights, antique ornaments and smaller pieces of furniture that evoke childhood memories.

"These things bring back lots of memories for people," she said.

Carol South is a local freelance writer.

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