

Perennial and new favorites make TC shopping fun

BY KRISTEN M. HAINS
Special to the Record-Eagle

This year in downtown Traverse City, holiday shoppers are finding a mix of old and new as they can visit perennial favorites as well as brand new retail stores.

One of downtown's veteran retail spots is Captain's Quarters. A mainstay for 38 years, the Captain's Quarters offers gift-giving options for men.

According to Manager Wayne Schmidt, a 20-year employee of Captain's Quarters, shoppers can expect a little more from their shopping experience.

"We know our customers, both as customers and as friends of the store," said Schmidt.

He explained that owner Maurie Allen's knowledge of his customers helps ensure that the Captain's Quarters will help each shopper find the perfect gift.

"Maurie knows his customers and keeps that in mind when doing his buying for the store," said Schmidt.

In addition to complimentary gift-wrapping, Captain's Quarters offers its shoppers another downtown holiday tradition, "Grandma Betsy's Hot Spiced Cider." For some 25 years, Allen's wife Betsy has prepared her "secret recipe" to greet shoppers as they enter the store.

Shoppers at Bayshore Framing in Downtown Traverse City will find a gift as special as the person who's receiving it. According to Owner Jeff Needham, holiday shopping isn't always about purchas-

ing a new print or piece of art, it's about giving life to a memory that already exists.

"Everybody has got treasures in the attic," said Needham.

Whether it's Grandpa's war medals, a christening or wedding gown, a football jersey or memorabilia from a family trip to Disneyland, Needham said all of these things hold the potential to become a lasting family treasure.

"The biggest thing to push the limit as far as creativity is shadow boxes," Needham explained. "We like to help our customers see beyond the limits of two dimensional artwork."

Needham said shadow boxes aren't limited to things that will fit on the wall. Needham can create shadow box tables, allowing family treasures to become a conversation piece of their own.

Bayshore Framing has been a part of downtown Traverse City for 24 years. The business was formerly a part of a franchise, which it left in 2001. Part of leaving that franchise also included a renovation last year.

When Bayshore Framing moved their in-house production facility downstairs, it opened up valuable Front Street retail space. It's space that Greg and Amy Gembis were quick to snatch up.

As one of downtown's newer stores, the Gembis' Pop-kies is billed as creating "gourmet popcorn and fun foods," Greg Gembis said the couple had a motivation for opening up their

gourmet popcorn shop.

After spending the past 15 years in corporate Chicago, Greg Gembis was ready to return to northern Lower Michigan. Both Greg and Amy have ties to Traverse City. Greg's family owned a business on Arbutus Lake for many years and Amy was born and raised here. As they contemplated starting their own family, they knew they wanted to head north. The inspiration for Pop-kies turned out to be right outside of Greg Gembis' office window.

Gembis worked in the office building directly above Garrett's, a gourmet popcorn shop that is world-famous. The Gembises decided to use that shop as their inspiration and to open their shop here in Traverse City.

Some of their most requested flavors are the movie-style buttered popcorn, caramel corn and cheddar corn. Their hottest seller is their Front Street Blend, a mixture of the caramel corn and cheddar cheese popcorn. Gembis says it satisfies that sweet/salty snack craving.

One flavor that is gaining quick popularity is the Cherry Capitol Crunch.

"It's our ode to Traverse City," Gembis said of the mixture that combines their caramel corn with dried cherries and cashews. Other favorites include cookies and cream, rainbow pop (a mixture of five fruit flavors), kettle corn and caramel apple.

For holiday gift-giving Pop-kies offers a variety of tins, starting at one gallon. Most of the tins can be divided, allowing the gift giver to choose up to three flavors to fill the can.

For those shoppers who simply can't find time to shop, check out the Web site, www.pop-kies.com. It offers on-line ordering with shipping throughout the United States.

Another new store greeting holiday shoppers is the Art and Soul Gallery. The gallery opened in Acme about three years ago and after waiting about a year and a half to find a location in downtown Traverse City, finally made the move.

"We want to be a part of the changes downtown," owner Amy Stinson explained, citing the Chamber of Commerce's "Cool Cities" initiative as an example.

Stinson said the greatest thing she offers holiday shoppers is diversity.

"We have pottery, jewelry,



Top photo: Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

Two downtown businesses not only represent Traverse City's perennial and new retail shops, but they are neighbors as well. Top, Pop-kies is the new kid on the Front Street block, where owners Greg and Amy Gembis make gourmet popcorn and other fun food. Above, BayShore Framing has been part of the Traverse City scene for 24 years. One of their holiday specialties is shadow box frames for valued mementos, like the Red Wings jersey pictured.

FAMILY

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Launching her 23rd Christmas season, Kim Kierczynski, owner of Kim's Hallmark on Munson Ave., has been thinking about Santa, presents and ornaments since July. That is when Hallmark premieres their collectible ornaments, though sometimes shoppers in shorts and flip-flops complain about the Christmas display.

"It's amazing because people will get upset when they see it but all I can say is, 'Well, it's done at the national level,'" said Kierczynski. "There's a lot of people who do buy their ornaments in July because they are collectors and don't want them to sell out. We take lists and

set them aside if asked."

Carrying the weight of the store on her shoulders requires hard work year-round from this small business owner. What she enjoys most of all is helping customers in the front, but often her managerial duties keep her out of sight.

"I enjoy the time out front, but I'm the bookkeeper, the accountant and I do the ordering, so I'm in the back quite a bit," said Kierczynski, who has five employees, one an almost full-time manager. "I do enjoy getting out front and talking to customers and helping them find things."

"Being a small business owner certainly has its challenges and its frustrations, but I enjoy it," she concluded.

Carol South is a local freelance writer.

sculpture, glass and paintings," she said.

She and partner Pam Dow work to bring a variety of art mediums to the gallery. Some of the gallery's current artists include Jill Johnson, Chuck Forman, Jerry Gates, Kathy Lyons, Pauline Viall, Dan Heron, Mary Fuscaldo, Robbie Carmichael, Vincent Pernicano, Dennis Bean-Larson, Onlee Bowden, Donna Weber, Emily Lichty-Woods, Mary Lizenby and Carol Murray-Cruzen.

The gallery is open Monday-Friday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m., Saturdays 11 a.m.-5 p.m. and is closed on Sundays. Stinson said the gallery will extend its hours

into the evening for holiday shopping.

Kristen M. Hains is a local freelance writer.

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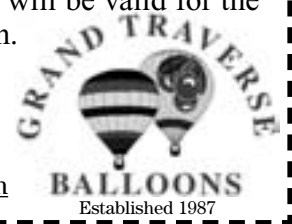
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