



August 2, 2009

Downtown business expands

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PORTLAND - A recent expansion has taken the Around the Block Quilt shop around the block -- literally.

The quilt shop continues to maintain its location at 120 Maple St. in Portland. However, the store has also expanded its location into the store front at 123 Kent St., which was the site of Grand River Communications.

Cathy McCann, who co-owns the store with her husband, Tom, and with Cathy and Steve Norton, said expansion was something that they had been discussing in the past.

"We are always getting in new things and we needed more room for the things that we had," said McCann. "When John (Wooden) decided to retire, we thought we better take it before someone else decides to take it.

"We have been adding items to our store ever since we first opened," said Norton. "At times we were afraid that one morning we would come and find everything that we had up on the walls would be on the floor."

McCann said the extra room has allowed to be seen better by customers

"We put up some new displays to make it easier for the shoppers to find items they are looking for," said McCann. "And John left us some of his display cases as well. He has been very cooperative and great to work with. Had we attempted to open a business like this in Lansing or Grand Rapids it would have cost a fortune. But John has been a great landlord and has worked with us on everything."

McCann said that business has still be good despite the struggling economy.

"Our sales of sewing machines has been slow, but the sales of quilting items has been steady," said McCann.

"It used to be slow during the summer months. But now people are driving around and doing shop-hops to different locations. So we have been quite steady, and we are coming up on our busiest time of the year."

McCann said among the upcoming events will be a large shop-hop that is expected to include two buses of people making trips to nearly 10 quilt shops.

Around the Block also holds a retreat that has grown continuously in the 10 years that the store has been open.

"We have been doing this retreat every year that we have had the store," said McCann.

"This year we have approximately 100 people signed up and we have outgrown the location that we normally hold the retreat. So instead we are having it at the 4-H retreat camp near Tustin."

McCann said the store is also marking its 10th year in business this year, but is still considering how to celebrate the event and the success that the store has had in its first 10 years.

"What has really helped us is that we have a good customer base and we are centrally located between Grand Rapids and Lansing," said McCann. "We have customers who come from both directions because we are easy to get to and are not far from the freeway.

"And Deb Rowe has also helped us," added McCann. "Whenever she gets a group of ladies to her business, she always sends them to us. That is a win-win situation for both of us."

McCann also credits the Portland Main Street program for the store's continued success.

"What has also helped us is the Portland Main Street program," said McCann.

"The classes and information that is offered really helps the business owners.

Plus all of the facade improvements in the downtown really make the area look nice and attractive to customers.

"But this is just a nice town to be in," added McCann. "Steve and I have lived here for 15 years and just enjoy the atmosphere and the nice community.

There really is not a bad part of town."

Around the Block Quilt Shop is located at 120 Maple St. The store can be reached at (517) 647-5430. The store also has a Web site at www.aroundtheblockquiltshop.com
