

February 16, 2007

Tradition Square growing with mix of restaurants, shops

BYLINE: Bill Church BJ contributor

To gain a true picture of shopping at the Town of Tradition, you need to exit I-95 and wend your way past the big-box shopping center under construction to the true center of town, Tradition Square. There, the only big shop is a Publix Super Market, which anchors a mix of smaller stores, restaurants and independent upscale boutiques serving Tradition residents and visitors.

Tradition Square is a pedestrian-friendly area where Core Communities Director of Leasing Andrea Mrozek said her focus was on providing service to the Tradition community.

"We wanted to make sure we had the basic services -- barber, dry cleaners, groceries -- but we also sought out a mix of restaurants and boutiques to offer items like home decor, garden and children's clothes," Mrozek said. "We intentionally went after independents and small local chains, rather than big national chains."

Despite the emphasis on Tradition customers, Mrozek said Tradition Square has been drawing shoppers from Vero Beach to Stuart.

Many shop owners also live in Tradition. Jessica Soumoff and her sister Patricia share both a residence and ownership of Salty Home, a home boutique with an eclectic mix of merchandise.

The Soumoffs moved from Long Island. Jessica earned a retailing degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan and worked at large stores and several smaller boutiques.

Salty Home was one of the first stores to open in Tradition Square in December 2005. It features furniture and home accent pieces, women's accessories, men's gifts and kids' collectibles and toys.

"If we see something we like and can display it, we'll bring it in," Jessica said.

The store had gross sales in January that doubled results for the same month of 2006. Jessica credits the easy-going atmosphere and special personality that an independent store can provide.

"Our customers feel relaxed and they become our friends," she said. "They come back often so the merchandise turns over very quickly."

The newest merchants and residents of Tradition also moved here from Long Island. Rosanna and Christopher Ferretti opened Couture Kids in early January and moved into their new Tradition home on Feb. 6.

The Ferrettis had a fine-food catering and pizza business on Long Island. As the mother of children ages 9 and 5, Rosanna became very familiar with lines and designers of children's clothing. She decided to open a high-end children's apparel, toys and gift shop.

Couture Kids features kids' clothing lines often found in Nordstrom, Bloomingdale's and Neiman-Marcus, but the Ferretis keep the price point a bit lower.

When Rosanna couldn't find the popular Webkinz animals any closer than West Palm Beach, she also began stocking them. Webkinz was voted the top toy in America at a recent industry show, and Rosanna said can't keep them in stock.

The newest restaurant at Tradition Square is also upscale and is owned by new Tradition residents. Chef Mark Zollo and his wife, Theresa, opened Cornerstone Bistro in late January.

After a long career in both family and exclusive restaurants, Zollo was recruited by the wealthy Horvitz family of Hollywood to be its private chef.

"That job gave me the opportunity to work with the finest food, beverages, china, and silverware in the world," Zollo said.

Horvitz family members liked to talk with Zollo for hours while he worked. He brought the same concept to his restaurant, with tables facing the open kitchen so that diners can watch Zollo and his cooks at work.

In addition to his cooking skills, Zollo also brought his handyman touch to the restaurant, doing all the woodwork, stainless steel and painting.

Cornerstone Bistro is a family affair. Theresa runs the front of the house. Her 20-year-old daughter, Nicole, busses tables and is learning the business.

Committed to his neighbors, Zollo will shut down the restaurant and rent it out for private parties if residents request it.

"We're here to serve the neighborhood," Zollo said.

Gina Grothe and her mother Barbara Marzulli were the first to open at Tradition Square in December 2005 when they welcomed customers to Sanctuary Day Spa.

Grothe worked previously in sales and marketing for a corporate aviation service, while Marzulli is a recognized leader in skin care who worked for others over the past 20 years.

They provide what they call 50 pampering treatments, including massage therapy, skin care, anti-aging treatment, nails, body treatments, waxing and professional make-up service.

Grothe splits her time between providing nail and body treatments to customers and managing the spa, including marketing and payroll.

"I basically live and breathe this," Grothe said. "I'm here six days a week from open to close, but it's very rewarding."

She said Tradition is the right location for business. Sales were 50 percent higher this January than a year earlier. She said the spa is heavily booked, especially on Saturdays.

Grothe notes the value to customers of a locally owned business.

"We pride ourselves on service," she said, "because we see our clients on a daily basis around the complex and in the Tradition Square stores."

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