

Downtown business owners share a vision

by Nadine Wark



Anna Miccolis and Billie Jo Gage

The glory days of a lively and vibrant downtown Sarnia seem to be returning. There is excitement, enthusiasm and energy in downtown these days, with shoppers not limiting themselves to the big box stores, but checking out the many new specialty shops and eateries popping up on Front and Christina Streets and elsewhere downtown.

Two business owners at 208 N. Front Street operate separate businesses, however share the same premises. Billie Jo Gage of Stardust Book Lounge and Anna Miccolis of Rhapsody Glassworks recently celebrated their one-year anniversary working together at the same location. "Mixing stained glass with books is not something one would normally do, however, it has turned out to be a great fit for us. We both love downtown Sarnia and especially our location," explained Billie Jo.

Billie Jo is Sarnia born and raised while Anna came to the area from Burlington in 1999. The two met while working at Blackwater Coffee. Billie Jo always had an interest in used books with the recycling/reusing aspect important to her. She states, "When hearing the words 'used books' or 'second-hand', many think of a cluttered, musty store, however our store is more like a new one...bright and visually appealing, roomy but with a relaxed, comfy atmosphere." She travels to find unique and special finds for her store and is proud to say "my books look almost new and at great prices." Just a quick tour of the shop confirmed that to be so. For those wishing to bring in their used books, she has a credit system in place. When the credits get used toward book purchases, there is 50% off the price.

Anna has her glassworks displayed throughout with many hanging from the ceiling, mixing with the impressive selection of used books that is Billie Jo's business. Anna has been working her magic with stained glass for the past several years. She explains, "About 98% of the glassworks are created by myself on-site, with the remainder made by artisans throughout Ontario. I also do custom pieces, stain glass repairs and antique stain glass restorations. Also available are a line of jewelry and ready-made giftware." She also teaches glassworking classes and workshops on Monday and Wednesday evenings, for both beginners and advanced. As space permits and depending on the skill level, students can also work independently during business hours.

Both encourage residents to shop downtown and agree that "downtown Sarnia has personality, heart and soul and we have seen a lot of positive changes." Both businesses support 'First Fridays' with Billie Jo's mother as well as friends helping out with a theme, food and beverages. They are also involved in Artwalk, the cultural and artistic festival held downtown in June (this year, the 6th & 7th) and have served on Artwalk committees. With their youthful energy and vision for the success of the downtown, Billie Jo Gage and Anna Miccolis are indeed an asset to the ongoing revitalization.

Hours of business for Stardust Book Lounge and Rhapsody Glassworks are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., phone #s, books, 519-337-7827 and glassworks, 519-466-5518, website www.rhapsodyglassworks.com.