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Villa Grove News

Serving Villa Grove, Camargo and the surrounding areas!



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Pages 8

Side Tracks

your express route to upcoming VG events

- 3/29 VG School Early Dismissal 1:30pm
 - First United Pentecostal Church of VG Pancake Breakfast 3/30 from 7am-10am @Fellowship Hall behind Dollar General-VG
 - April 2 Election
 - VG Lions Club Pork Chop Dinner and Cash Giveaway 4/6 from 5-7 @ School Cafeteria Contact Lions Club Member for Info or Tickets
 - Free Showing of "I Can Only Imagine" movie 3/31--4:00 pm @ VGUMC
 - 4/8 VG PTO Meeting 6:30pm
 - 4/10 VG School Early Dismissal 1:30pm
 - 4/10 VG Booster Club Meeting 6pm
 - 4/12 VG School 4th Quarter Midterm
 - 4/13 Camargo Township District Library Annual Dinner & Mystery Play @ Villa Grove School 6pm
 - 4/14 Palm Sunday
 - 4/15 School Board Meeting 6pm
 - 4/18-22 VG School Spring Break
 - 4/19 Good Friday
 - 4/21 Easter
 - 4/21 Annual VFW Easter Egg Hunt @ Henson Park 2pm
 - 4/23 VG K-3 Spring Concert 6pm
 - 4/30 Spring Band Concert Grades 5-12 @7pm
 - 5/17-18 Villa Grove Town Wide Garage Sales
 - 5/18 Camargo Township District Library Kids Prom for Pre-K - 3rd Grade 6pm-7pm
 - 5/23 Villa Grove School 8th Grade Promotion
- If you have an upcoming event that you would like to see featured in Sidetracks, email us at vgnews@mchsi.com or call us at 832-4201

Sweet Soul Isn't Just a Name for New Boutique Owners

By Tony Hooker Staff Writer

Upon entering Tuscola's Sweet Soul Boutique, one can't help but feel a calming, peaceful vibe. From the lighting to the décor to the scented candles and prayer wall, the store exudes an aura that is all too often missing these days. This is all part of the plan, according to proprietors Stacey Rea and Dana Clark. The two newly minted entrepreneurs (the shop is in its third week of business) took a few minutes to sit down with me and discuss their labor of love.

To get things started, let's get a little bit of background about the two of you. Stacey, where did you grow up?

(SR) All over. I met Bob and we moved to Villa Grove, around twenty years ago.

Dana you're almost a life-long Villa Grovian, right?

(DC) We moved to Villa Grove in 1976. My dad was on the railroad.

Is this your first venture into retail?

(SR) Yes. We've both worked in retail before, but this is our first time as owners. What was the impetus? Where did the idea come from?

(DC) We love to shop! <smiles> We love clothes. We love jewelry. We love shoes, everything that we have here, and we love people. We talked about how we wanted this experience because her and I go shopping...well we used to but now we're here! <laughing> We shop all the time, and we have the best time, just as girlfriends, going shopping, meeting people and talking to new people. We just love it. It's something that we've been talking about doing. We've been best friends for about 13 years, and we always talked about it and we decided to just do it.

I love the look of your store, it's very cute, very modern. Is there a particular place that you kind of had in mind when you began to put your store together?

(SR) We've been to several places. We shop boutiques a lot. Dana, with her travels for work, she's been into several of them. We did the malls over the years, but we kind of drifted toward the boutiques, and the more we went to boutiques, the more we liked them. We like the individual service, we liked how you could only buy a few of each item. When we started to talk about it, we sat down with the guys (husbands Bob Rea and Jim Clark) and we said that "This is what we want

to do. We want the individual service." Then we realized that here in this area, there isn't one yet. We thought this would be a golden opportunity for our families, not just us. Why not go for it and open one up here locally.

For clarification's sake, a boutique is a one-off store, not part of a chain?

(SR) It's where you can only get specialty items. It's where you can get six, or if you get a double order, twelve of any one item, whereas if you go to a big box store, you'll see that item at all the big box stores. Here, you're only going to see six of any one item, and it's only going to be here for a week.

(DC) Some items we can re-order, but most of the time, not. The clothes you see here now, you might not see them tomorrow. Our little motto is "If you like it today and you want to go home and think about it, it might not be here tomorrow."

Where do your products come from?

(SR) We go to market. There are four markets per year that we attend, and we also have the ability to order products on line. You have to have a license to attend these markets. Do you sell local artisans' items?

(SR) Yes! We want to encourage that. We want to sell things that fit with our boutique style. We sell the soaps that come from Neoga. We've got the bracelets over here that come from Villa Grove. We've got earrings from Tuscola.

How would you define your style?

(DC) Casual. A little bit business. Kind of laid back, home town casual.

(SR) It's everything from high school to mommy casual. We do try to cater to the older lady, as well. We carry every size from small to 3X.

(DC) That's what we've found to be the hardest thing when we go to market. Trying to find a size zero compared to 3x. Trying to find the mix of size and style and still match the appropriate age is challenging.

How did you come to find this location?

(DC) We stalked buildings for a long time! <laughs> We spent probably two years, driving around and looking at buildings. We considered other towns as well. We know that there are some issues at malls. We knew that there is a good draw in this location with Joe's, the Candy Kitchen, the new restaurant, the Vault,



Stacey Rea and Dana Clark at their shop, The Sweet Soul Boutique.

Vintage Karma and the salon next door. I think that it's starting to come back to how it was when we were growing up. Downtown shopping is coming back.

This downtown area has sort of a trendy, hip vibe to it, and this store fits right in. Was that conscious or did it just happen?

(DC) It was conscious. I travel all over the state of Illinois for work, and there are a couple of towns that are amazing to me. It's like going back in time to when we were kids when we would come up town and it was just busy. A lot of boutiques have an online presence, and we will also, but we will always have a storefront.

I'm not sure if it was intentional, but this store has the feeling to me that shopping here is an event, not just a shopping trip.

(SR) We've been open for three weeks, and we have a group of runners who have coffee and then they come in here, every Saturday. It's become their routine, which is what we want. We have these little girls who come in every Saturday on their bicycles. They come in and go to the prayer wall and shop, even though they don't have any money, but they pretend that they're older. They talk to us.

How did you come up with the name Sweet Soul Boutique?

(DC) That was probably one of the hardest things! We were trying to come up with something that was catchy, something that was us, something that we try to be. We are trying to create. A sweet, friendly experience. We want people to come back, just to visit.

(SR) We wanted soul in there, because that's a big part of who we are, with going to

church and everything, so we sat on their couch for two weeks, going through music titles and movies, going through anything we could find with the word soul in it...

(DC) Looking at our husbands and saying "Are you kidding me? No!" <Both laugh>

(SR) Finally, we just kept coming back to the word "sweet" and that's the simplest word you could come up with. The angel wings just sort of came together. That was more of a God thing, and then the whole thing just sort of morphed together.

Tell me about the prayer wall.

(DC) We did the prayer wall because there are people who are alone. They don't have anyone to talk to. There are so many people who are hurting and don't want to ask for help. We came up with this prayer wall. You can use it to express thanksgiving, too. No one has to see it, you can just put it right in the jar and we'll pray for that without being specific. We've already seen some prayers being answered, too!

(SR) It's a good outreach, too. We've had people come in and ask which church we go to.

You're now three weeks in. Has it met your early expectations?

(both) Yes!

Has it exceeded them?

(SR) Well no, I can always do better! <laughs>

(DC) It has met our early goals, but of course when your reach your goal, you want more. I want to thank everyone from this community and the communities surrounding us for making our opening weekend so special. It's amazing how people have supported us.

(SR) We've had people from Sullivan all the way to St. Joe and down to Hindsboro who have stopped in.

(DC) Our first weekend was amazing, but we have to kind of take that out of

the picture financially, but we're doing good. The more we sell, the faster we can get new things in and the faster things change! We have loyal people who come in every Saturday morning. They will want to see something new, every week!

(SR) It's been good, especially for this time of year. Winter is still kind of hanging on, so people are looking for spring but they're not really ready to wear spring. We opened at kind of a bad time of year.

(DC) We missed the Christmas season. Like I said, I go to a lot of boutiques around Illinois when I'm traveling for work, and we've got a lot of mentors and we hope to do the same thing for someone else, in the future. They said that January and February are bad months and that things will pick up starting in March and by April it will be good. We're open from 10-6 Tuesday-Friday, and on Saturday we're open 10-4. Our hours may change depending on what peoples' needs are, and with the new restaurant opening we're excited about that.

It's only been three weeks, but do you have any ideas about the future?

(SR) We're going to be building our online business. My husband would really like a "Bro-tique"! <both laugh>

What would you have in a bro-tique?

He's thinking all the beard products, and the socks and beard oils. We've had so many men come in and ask what we have for them.

(DC) I've been to one near Chicago that has button down shirts and the funny socks and beard stuff and we might dabble in that.

Is there anything you would like to add?

(DC) Our husbands built everything in here.

(SR) They were amazing from the get go! They've been so supportive.

How about the two of you? Are you begin- **Cont. pg. 2**

VGSB Inducted Into the CBAI Centurial Club



Villa Grove State Bank was inducted into the CBAI Centurial Club for Attainment of 100 Years of Dedicated Community Service. VGSB staff, officers & directors are proud of this achievement and recognition.

Beck Kisses Pig



Mr. Beck challenged Villa Grove Elementary to read 600 books and he would kiss a pig. The kids read 1,001 books and at PTO Family Fun Night on March 22 he kept his promise.