

# Winery becomes gift store ripe with vintage treasures

By M.B. Dillon  
staff writer

If Queen Victoria and Charles Dickens stepped out from behind a corner in the Ole General Store in Farmington, they'd fit right in.

Newly opened in what used to be the LaSalle winery on Grand River, the family-owned general store sells handmade and specially ordered treasures from the Victorian age in homespun surroundings.

If you're looking for one-of-a-kind holiday ornaments or reasonably priced handcrafted gifts for children, in-betweeners or adults, visiting this three-story, 115-year-old building is the next best thing to traveling back in time and browsing in Santa's workshop.

The 16,000-square-foot store is very possibly the only place in the world where you can stand in a barn again wine vat and shop till you drop.

The store occupies the west end of what many remember as LaSalle Wines and Champagnes Inc., a winery that operated in the ivy-covered brick structure from 1933 to 1970. Glass-covered stone that once lined the insides of giant vats still covers parts of the walls and ceiling.

Shoppers easily get to know the outgoing owners — Beverly Gruenewald and her daughters Lynn McDonough and Kim Cromwell. Gruenewald and Cromwell are from Farmington Hills; McDonough lives in Brighton. The talented threesome

make many of the items for sale. Husband, son and sons-in-law get the credit for the handcarved shelves, and reasonably-priced hardwood tables and quilt racks.

The 83,000-square-foot building was the original powerhouse for a trolley line (The Detroit United Line) in the early 1900s and also served as a terminal for the Detroit Urban Railroad. Plans for a 450-seat restaurant and theater facility proposed in the 1970's by James Constand, owner of the Jim's Garage restaurant in Detroit, never materialized.

For 16 years, Beverly Gruenewald and McDonough have owned and operated Colonial Communications, a secretarial service with office space in the same building.

THE SHOP evolved from what began as a girls' day off.

"We all got into crafts and we were always making something," said Beverly Gruenewald. "My daughters, daughter-in-law — I call her my daughter, too — and myself decided that every Sunday we'd take turns gathering at each other's house. We'd get together and do our crafts, and the girls could leave their kids at home."

"We started getting an awful lot of crafts. We didn't quite realize how much we were accumulating," she said.

A store was born.

Business has been brisk since the grand opening Thanksgiving weekend, even though the entrepreneurs

have done little advertising.

Part of the reason, the owners surmise, is that their wares are reasonably priced. "We want to have nice things, but priced so that anyone can shop here," they say. Both children and grandmothers have done their Christmas shopping at the store, and had their gifts wrapped. "We're easy prey for that," says Lynn McDonough.

Some visitors have been to the building many times before.

"An elderly gentleman named Emmet stopped in to show us how to start the boiler. He used to be the boiler tender for the winery," said Beverly Gruenewald. "And we had a woman come in whose father was the president of the winery."

On the former loading dock on the west side of the Ole General Store, and sometimes on the roadside, it's easy for passers-by to spot Santa — actually a well-disguised female mannequin. Santa is accompanied by other life-sized figures set in a wintry scene.

Garlands and greenery in aged wine crates adorn the massive arched windows. The potential of the spacious loading dock isn't lost on the Gruenewalds. They're eyeing it as a splendid site for an outdoor old-fashioned ice cream parlor, a venture they may pursue this spring.

Heidi and her cousin Clara would love the store's kids' room. It's loaded with old-fashioned wind-up toys and pop-out books, paper dolls complete with wardrobes, stuffed bunnies, octascopes and leaded glass.

A corner of the room is penny candy heaven. There are licorice pipes, giant lollipops, button candy, and candy necklaces. Another room is full of dolls of every description, most of them priced from \$16-\$35.

Older shoppers may choose from Christmas angels made of wool; wooden welcome signs; porcelain tea pots; bird feeders; wind chimes and figurines made of pewter; antiques; clocks; furniture including handcrafted roll-top desks; cast iron gingerbread makers; and handmade wreaths.

There are old-fashioned post cards and Christmas cards; assorted teas in small wooden boxes; tapestry-covered pillows; and wooden angels with hair made from Spanish moss. Cromwell receives from her in-laws in Orono, Maine.

You can step into America's past at 31505 Grand River from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sundays. "But," says Lynn Gruenewald, "We'll stay open as long as people are coming in the door."



photos by SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Lynn McDonough (top), Bev Gruenewald and Kim Cromwell have turned LaSalle Winery into a thriving store with holiday gifts. Adele McEl-

derry of Southfield (left) browses through the books at the Ole General Store on Grand River.

## Volunteers wanted

American Cancer Society is looking for volunteers to work in several capacities.

Volunteers are needed to answer phone calls and assist with patient service. This involves referrals, giving information and registering patients for medical equipment and/or supplies. The position requires strong communication skills, a sensitive ear and attention to details. It requires the commitment of one afternoon or morning a week.

People are also needed to transport cancer patients short distances for treatment at area hospitals.



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