

Marketer welcomes mall guests

With both Somerset Collection tenants and customers demanding TLC, marketing director Linda McIntosh puts on a happy face each day to assist all.

BY SUSAN DEMAGGIO
EDITOR

As new marketing director of the Somerset Collection in Troy (which she refers to as "downtown Michigan"), Linda McIntosh worries about satisfying "some very busy customers."

"We aim to far exceed the expectations of our guests," she said. "And I do mean guests. We're the premier shopping center in the state - there are 94 stores and restaurants here that you cannot find anywhere else in Michigan. The architecture of the center makes it a destination for many international visitors. We have a standard to maintain."

McIntosh of Livonia, came to Somerset Collection, a Forbes Cohen property in July 1997 after years of marketing two Taubman malls - Fairlane in Dearborn and Briarwood in Ann Arbor.

As mom to teenagers Kelli, 15, and Rob, 13, she runs a long, busy day - up at 5 a.m. driving Kelli to figure skating practice, and after work and weekends, she follows Rob to travel hockey games and Kelli to cheerleading sessions.

She is a 1974 graduate of Stevenson High School in Livonia, and points out that "it's tough to see my kids attend my old rival, Churchill High School." McIntosh earned a marketing degree from Michigan State University.

"These days marketers have to be more creative in stretching their budget dollars," she said. "At Somerset Collection, we're micro-marketing to bring in the business person who works along Adams Road or Big Beaver. We're macro-marketing to bring in the Japanese car manufacturer, in town to attend the Auto Show. As a year-old center, we're still enjoying the curiosity factor - 18 percent of our shoppers are still first-time guests."

According to mall estimates, 35,000



Downtown Michigan: Strolling through the Somerset Collection North in Troy, marketing director Linda McIntosh keeps an eye out for anything that might detract from a pleasant shopping experience for customers from around the globe.

guests visit Somerset Collection daily, the figure jumps to 60,000 on weekends.

McIntosh said she is serious when she insists that working at Somerset Collection "is a privilege."

"It's so beautiful here," she said with a wide grin. "And there's always something new."

Fans of the television show Seinfeld will be delighted to know that a J. Peterman catalog store is opening on the south side in April. That's the company "Elaine" works for on the show, with the eccentric owner putting out wild, weird and wonderful merchandise to descriptive catalog prose that reads like a romance novel.

A Crate & Barrel furniture store is also opening on the south side in the fall. And Saks Fifth Avenue is in the middle of a store-wide expansion that will add a spa, cafe and home decor

department to its offerings.

McIntosh said partnerships with the Detroit Visitors and Convention Bureau will help retail centers all over metro Detroit, especially when developments proposed for the city get under way.

"Right now we do a lot of business with shoppers from out-of-town, especially Toledo and Windsor," she explained. "Requests from shoppers for directions to the airport, Ann Arbor, or Greenfield Village, were so numerous that our concierge desks now provide maps for visitors."

Coming off her first holiday season at Somerset Collection, McIntosh reported sales were generally up across the board in all merchandise categories with Rand McNally earning its company's "Turkey Award" for the most sales in the country.

"This year, the gift wrappers in the

VIP lounge wrapped 33 percent more gifts than in 1996, and the sales of gift certificates from the Somerset Collection were also way up. In fact, our real problem was running out of merchandise! If you could find a men's x-large sweater anywhere in the center a week before Christmas you were lucky!"

McIntosh said attracting shoppers to both sides of the center joined by the pedestrian skywalk high over Big Beaver Road, is one of her biggest challenges.

"Yes, the south side is quieter since the north side opened, but popular south side stores like J. Crew and Crate & Barrel are helping marry the two centers. Mondy, with its Men's Night Only shopping event, also helped draw customers to the south side during the holidays."

PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Customer service: Posing in the new West Bloomfield Klein's store, are (from left) Bob Firman, Toni Bango and Howard Klein.

Klein's opens second store

Klein's of Livonia, a family-run, career and casual clothing shop for men and women (with roots dating back to 1910), now has a sister location - Klein's West Bloomfield.

The new store opened in October in the Westwind Lake Village Shopping Center on Haggerty and Pontiac Lake roads in West Bloomfield.

Klein's of Livonia, meanwhile, continues to thrive at the location it's been at for nearly 20 years, Six Mile Road and Newburgh, in Livonia's Newburgh Plaza.

"The Livonia store is busier than ever and we're very pleased with the way our new store is being received," said Howard Klein, 42, co-owner and president of Klein's.

Both stores offer moderately priced (and some higher-end), brand-name fashion merchandise for men and women.

"We don't do a lot of faddy-trendy things," Klein said. "We carry more classic things. Because if something is going to go out of fashion in three months, then we feel it's not a value."

Some of the brand names the store carries include: (for men) Enro, Levi, Haggan, and Savane; (for women), Rafacella, Winel and Carol Anderson; and (for both men and women) Woolrich, Nautica, Tommy Bahama and Cinere.

In general, women's slacks range from \$34 to \$80; men's slacks from \$40 to \$90, with most being about \$60; men's suits \$250 to \$390, with most being \$299 to \$349; and dressier dresses range from \$100 to \$150, Klein said.

Basic alterations are free for both men and women on most items that aren't sale-priced. Gift wrapping and gift boxes are also free.

Klein's is most known for its personalized service. That includes everything from knowing customers by name, to special-ordering merchandise upon request (when possible), to the stores' buyers bringing back items from fashion trade shows with a specific customer in mind ("Oh, that's the kind of dress Mrs. Smith likes").

Klein said it's that personalized service and his company's ability to adapt to changes in the marketplace (for example, the trend toward casual business days, which left many apparel stores reeling), that has enabled it to survive against the competition it continues to face from malls, department stores and boutiques.

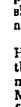
Klein's was founded by his grandfather, Sam Klein, about 1916, in the Delray section of Detroit. The business later moved to the Plymouth and Evergreen area of Detroit and was located there for many years.

In 1979, Klein and his father, Edward, moved the store to its current location in Livonia.

Klein said the decision to open a second location was based on several factors. First business was the good at the Livonia store, so the timing seemed right. Secondly, a significant number of the Livonia store's customers had moved from Wayne County to the West Bloomfield/Commerce area.

The manager of the new store is Bob Firman. He's been in the retail clothing business for more than 25 years and started with the well-known men's apparel shop, Ell of Troy. He's been with Klein's for four years. Klein divides his time between the two stores and continues to manage the Livonia store. Hours are Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Livonia store (313) 691-9244 or the West Bloomfield store (248) 669-1999.

SHOPPING CENTERED



DONNA MULCAHY

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New Italian store is a family affair

BY BARB PEIT TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

"Everything is good. All is well."

That translation of the Italian phrase *tutto bene* couldn't be a more appropriate description for the new home decor shop Jennifer Rancilio recently opened in



Jennifer Rancilio

downtown Birmingham. The 24-year-old owner of Tutto Bene, a shop specializing in Italian ceramics, glass, jewelry and home furnishings, enjoyed a warm welcome to the retail market from both local shop owners and area customers.

"We just had a really good Christmas," smiled Rancilio, whose enthusiasm for her new venture is abundantly clear. An Albion College graduate, Rancilio earned a bachelor's degree in Economics and spent two years working at local advertising agency before branching out on her own.

"This has been in the dream stages for me for well over a year," said Rancilio, a longtime fan of Italian home decor. After leasing the space for her shop downtown that August, Rancilio began formulating concrete plans for her dream. She hired a local design firm, Jon Greenberg and Associates, to help shape the look and feel of the new store.

"I wanted it to be as Italian as possible so we got the designers and they helped us out with the color schemes and the interior look, like the shelving," said Rancilio.

Once the ideas were laid out on paper, Rancilio and her family spent the next several months painting and pounding their own nails. They even put in the shop's floor prior to opening.

"I was lucky to have my brothers to do so much of the work for me," said Rancilio. Boasting a warm, classic look, a focal point of Tutto Bene is a painted brick mural at the entrance. The store, roughly 1,200 square feet, includes 700 square feet of selling space.

A hot item is a line of ceramics by Sicilian-artist Nino Parrucca. Many customers are avid collectors of Parrucca designs, particularly serving pieces and candle holders.

"His things are very primary-colored and really bright and I wasn't sure how they would go," said Rancilio, who stocks plenty of pieces from the Parrucca line.

Bringing imported Italian hand-made ceramic pieces, including everything from dish ware to picture frames, to the local market was important to Rancilio.

"I wanted to show off the art side of Italy, sure the food is good, too, but this is

the art and home decor side," she said. "And it's not all just decorative pieces. We have lots of serving pieces and many are dishwasher safe."

"This is not a chain, it's a very unique store with lots of gift items and it has that boutique style," she said.

Currently busy running her business a dozen hours a day, six days a week hasn't dampened Rancilio's entrepreneurial spirit. She hopes the future brings her debut in the wholesale market perhaps even establishing her own Tutto Bene catalog.

"I really have to give my family a lot of the credit because they gave me the courage to finally quit my job and go for it," said Rancilio. She still encounters surprised looks from customers who can't believe the shop boasts such a youthful owner.

"I can't blame anyone for that. I'm surprised by it myself," she laughed.

Tutto Bene is located one block north of Maple at 215 Old Woodward in Birmingham. Store hours Monday-Wednesday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and Friday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

(248) 626-0886.
Sidewalk Sales

Westland Center offers more than 60 stores clearing winter merchandise at rock bottom prices through Jan. 19.

Wayne/Warren, Westland.
(313) 425-5001.
Walkers meet

Doors open at 7 a.m. near Olga's Kitchen. 9:15 a.m. meeting with speaker in the lower level community room. Free to all.

Westland Center Wayne/Warren.
(313) 425-5001.

Sidewalk Sale
Mall merchants hold center-wide clearance sales through Monday, Jan. 19 during regular business hours near their storefronts.

Tel. Twelve Mall, 12 Mile/Telegraph, Southfield.
(248) 353-4111.

FRIDAY, JAN. 16
Designer visits

Sportswear designer Ron Leal unveils his spring collection at Jacobson's from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Look for vibrant silks, knit trousers, jackets and tops.
336 West Maple, Birmingham.
(248) 644-6900.

SATURDAY, JAN. 17

Arthur visits
Meet the SBS character during Hudson's in-store appearances in the Kids Department, noon to 3 p.m. On Jan. 18 at Somerset North store, noon to 3 p.m. Oakland Mall, 14 Mile/John R. Troy.
(248) 443-6263.

Story hour
Barney & Noble hosts "Miss Hattie's Book of Short Stories and Tall Tales," 11 a.m. to noon. Free. Reservations not required.
Telegraph/Maple, Bloomfield Hills.
(248) 540-4209.

Bridal show
Jacobson's, The Community House and the Townsend Hotel join forces to host an afternoon of ideas for engaged couples 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jacobson's holds a fashion gown show 1-2 p.m. plus demonstrations on cooking for two. Tickets are \$25 to benefit the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland.
325 N. Woodward, Birmingham.
(248) 332-7173.