

Bargains in Bad Axe



For a mere \$9.99 I am walking tall. I couldn't resist buying Rocket Dog brand leather shoes with three-inch platform rubber heels and ivory-colored sneaker-like styling during my last shopping trip to

Bad Axe.

The over-sized treasures weigh like anvils on my feet, but they give my image that little something extra — the way monster truck tires do on a tricycle.

Even if I wear them only once, the shoes will be worth every penny I spent.

Never mind the gas and time it took to get them, as well as \$58 worth of other bargains I brought home one recent Saturday afternoon. The two-hour trip to the near tip of Michigan's thumb is as much a pleasant excursion as it is a shopping trip.

As Van Dyke becomes M-63, the suburban landscape gives way to cornfield, cows and quaint downtowns.

M-63 is no Rodeo Drive and Bad Axe, no Beverly Hills. But if you're looking for a pair of Keds sneakers, polyester pants, Levi denim shirts, camouflage hunting jackets and snowmobile suits all under one roof, your search ends at Norman's in Bad Axe, where bargains are serious business.

The store, one of five in the "up north" retail chain, is a neon green welcome mat on Bad Axe's southwest side, greeting motorists as M-63 curves east into the city outskirts.

The store exterior looks like one big continuous sidewalk sale.

Depending on the season, you might find athletic bags, soft nylon luggage, Spartan and Wolverine sweatshirts, inflatable rafts and all order of blindingly bright orange hunting gear stacked and hanging along the store facade.

Walk inside, look around and then tilt your head back. Yep, that's merchandise up there at a height only a still-walker would love.

Norman's supplies hooked poles at every aisle for extricating fashion from the packed, ceiling-high racks. Try hooking a piece from a group of blouses or shirts before moving on to heavier items. It may feel awkward at first. You'll probably dump a few extra on the floor or nearly KABONK a fellow shopper, but practice on a few and you'll be a pro in no time.

Shoes and boots are an easy search, arrayed within reach or by step ladder. I passed on the Take Ten embroidered pink tennis shoes and snatched up a pair of cushy, fur-lined Skandia boots in winter white for about \$20.

Rocket Dogs in cream color went over black.

The women's department is a mix of contemporary sportswear and the stuff of memory lane. I found myself exclaiming, "Gosh, I remember polyester pantsuits," and "Gee, I used to fit into size 8 mini skirts."

Norman's stocks lots of novelty teeshirts, athletic team sweatshirts, blue jeans, sporty skirts, blouses, sportswear sets and nightwear. Sporty describes the men's and children's merchandise, too.

Bulky women's novelty sweaters ranged from \$4.99 to \$9.99. Levi's denim shirts were a steal at \$5.99 and ski pants were worth the \$19 price tag.

I bought a white embroidered spring skirt and matching black tee-shirt top set for \$9.99 and a pleated denim skirt for about \$6.

I added a pair of winter gloves (\$1.99) and heavy snowmobile mittens (about \$6) to my cart.

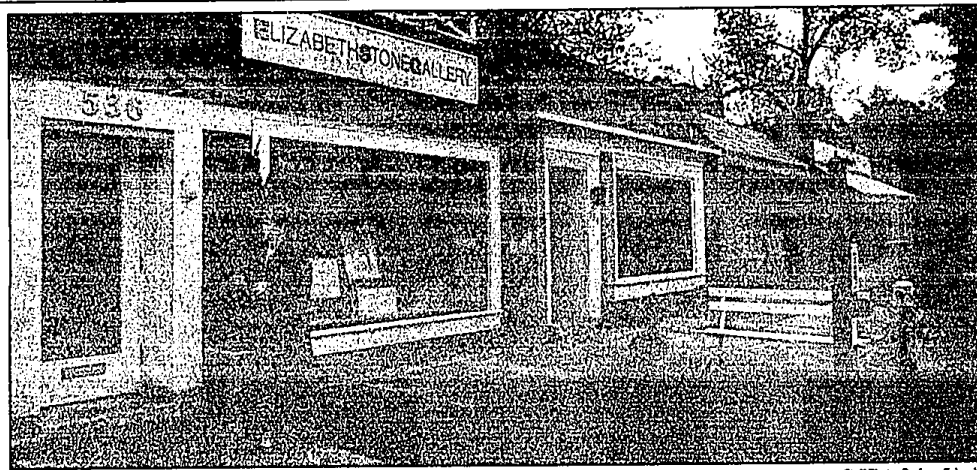
The overnight bag in burgundy nylon was a last-minute, impulse buy. It cost around \$7. I couldn't resist.

I checked out with about \$68 worth of merchandise and waited for my brother-in-law — a diehard Norman's fan — to finish shopping for wool socks and other basics.

My parents, who came along for the ride, make Norman's a twice annual pilgrimage. We can't resist. Like the sign says, *Lowest Every Day Prices*. Norman's also has stores in Bay City, Gaylord, East Tawas and Standish.

The Bad Axe store is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., on Sundays. Call 517-289-9222.

—by Sharon Dargay



Staff Photos By Jerry Zolnysky

Checking out stores: A shopper strolls along "gallery row" at the north end of Old Woodward, in downtown Birmingham.

Merchants on Birmingham's gallery row celebrate spring

BY SHARON DARGAY
STAFF WRITER

Elizabeth Stone and her neighbors along North Old Woodward are a little like orphans in Birmingham's downtown.

Sure, they're a part of the principal shopping district's retail family, but without an Old Woodward or Maple address they feel distanced from their downtown cousins.

"For people who come to the galleries and shops here, it's a destination. People come here for a reason. You don't get a lot of browsers," says Stone, who sells children's books and original book illustrations from her 10-year-old store. "Being in the uptown area, we need the exposure because we're in such a separate location."

Stone and other merchants along "gallery row," are throwing a party next weekend to lure shoppers and neighboring homeowners to the retail strip south of Oak.

Story tellers, face-painters and information peddlers will set up shop from noon to 5 p.m., on May 20 in Booth Park at Harmon and North Old Woodward.

The Birmingham school district's Evergreen Singers will perform and Taty Viola will serenade customers at Salvatore Scallopini. Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority will lead Rouge River nature walks from 2-4 p.m.

Spring Celebration also will include:

■ A strolling children's fashion show. Lego contest, mini murals and balloon animals at Annie Dauphinee Youngwear.

■ An art exhibition and book signing by children's book authors and illustrators, including Denise Brennan-Nelson, Michael Monroe, Matt Faulkner, Cyd Moore, John Sandford, Brenda Shannon Yee, Wendy Anderson Halperin, Lynne Rae Perkins, Rhonda Gowler Greene, Kim Marie Wood, Franziska Schoenfeld and Janie Bynum.

■ Drawings for gift certificates at Farrell Reis Salon and Gallery Nikko.

■ Storyteller Judy Sima spinning yarns from 1-3 p.m., in Booth Park, sponsored by Greenstones Jewelers.

■ Free lemonade and snacks, coloring books and crayons at Salvatore Scallopini.

■ Arts and crafts in Booth Park, sponsored by Metro Parent Magazine.

Stone and John Heinley, Birmingham's Principal Shopping District director, hope shoppers continue to visit the area long after the hoopla's over.

"My contention is that they are in downtown Birmingham, but there's a gap in the retail

between our core downtown and here," explained Heinley, whose PSD office is located in the North Old Woodward gallery row, about a block from Stone's shop.

"It's a beautiful walk between the two. By big city standards it's nothing, but Birmingham being a small town, it may feel like a long way."

In Plymouth

Melanie Purcell, Plymouth's Downtown Development Director, knows the feeling.

Plymouth's Old Village shopping district is located about a half-mile from the central business area, but it's not a part of the Plymouth DDA. Old Village shops and stores located even closer to DDA boundaries, don't benefit from DDA-funded improvements to central business district parking lots, lighting and landscape improvements.

And they can't participate in Plymouth's PSD marketing and promotional events. DDA and PSD boundaries coincide in the western Wayne County community.

"It's frustrating for them," Purcell said. "There's no formal organization or separate funding for Old Village. We've tried to do some joint (but separate) projects."

Halloween is a good example. The Plymouth PSD sponsored a store-to-store trick or treat event on Devil's Night last year. Old Village closed its streets for *Monster Mash*, an outdoor dance, the following day.

"I can't close streets in the downtown without causing a major impact," Purcell explained. "It worked out well. Halloween is a good example of how we try to play off of each other so that no one is left out."

The PSD also works closely with the local Chamber of Commerce because its membership includes Old Village shops and stores outside the DDA.

"The more participation the better," Purcell said.

Rochester merchants

Kristi Trevarrow, special events coordinator for the Rochester Downtown Development Authority, tries hard to keep all 350 DDA businesses happy and within the fold.

"You find there are some businesses that don't feel as included as others," Trevarrow noted.

That includes some merchants with stores on Walnut or Water street, just a block either side of Main, and on Main north of University.

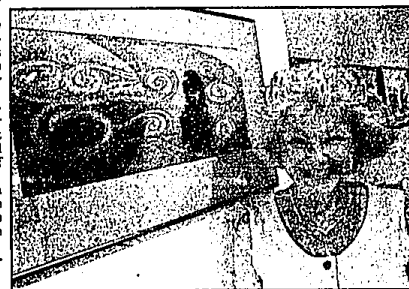
Trevarrow includes them in the events calendar, in stories and on front and back covers of the DDA's twice annual magazine, *In Town*. "During sidewalk sales we offer stores on the side streets a chance to move up to Main street," she added. Offices and merchants who don't participate in the outdoor sale make space for neighboring businesses that do.

Trevarrow also hopes the city's new Farmer's Market, which assembles every Saturday in a parking lot east of Main, will bring attention to downtown and neighboring shops.

Stone says park improvements and a new traffic-slowing device on North Old Woodward will do the same for gallery row in Birmingham.

"The next thing we're working on is the park. They're (the city) going to remove the ugly fence there. We're supposed to get more trees and flower beds and the neighborhood association wants to do an ice rink," she said.

"This is a revival."



Event coordinator: Elizabeth Stone, owner of Elizabeth Stone Gallery, stands near Debra Reid Jenkins' creation *I Feel the Wind With Its Whispery Tail*. The children's book illustrator will be on hand during for Spring Celebration, an event Stone devised to bring more shoppers to North Old Woodward stores.

Retail, style and special store events are listed in this calendar. Please send information to *Malls & Mainstreets*, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Main, Birmingham, MI 48009. Fax: (248) 644-1314. Information must be received by 5 p.m. Monday for publication the following Sunday.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17

MAKEUP ARTIST

Chanel National Makeup artist Conrad Sanchez visits the cosmetics department at Jacobson's in Birmingham from noon to 7 p.m. Call (248) 644-6900 for details.

THURSDAY, MAY 18

CONTEMPORARY SPORTSWEAR WORKSHOP, a division of Garfield and Marks, will show its collection of functional fashion at Fibres in

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Birmingham. The clothing will be on display from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., today, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday and Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m., Sunday. Call Fibres at (248) 723-2880.

LAFAYETTE 148

Ros & Sherm shows off Lafayette 148 suits, separates, dresses and scarves in a trunk show that starts today and runs through Saturday, May 20. Ros & Sherm is located in the Bloomfield Plaza, 6536 Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills. Call (248) 855-8877.

FRIDAY, MAY 19

CARDS AND COINS

Check out the card, coin, stamp and collectibles

show at Wonderland Mall in Livonia through Sunday. The free event includes an appearance by World Series Champ Mickey Lolich from 1-3 p.m., on Saturday, May 20.

HAVEN BENEFIT

Don't miss the reservation deadline for Brunch with Chanel, a fashion show to benefit The Haven on May 23 at Saks Fifth Avenue in The Somerset Collection, Troy. Tickets are \$50 and include a brunch at 11 a.m. and fashion show of Chanel's fall and winter ready-to-wear clothing, at 11:30 a.m. Call The Haven at (248) 334-2343, ext. 131.

SATURDAY, MAY 20

FUN FOR KIDS

Olde World Canterbury Village in Lake Orion will offer a weekend of fun, including a Lego building competition, a yo-yo competition, face painting and caricatures. Call 248-391-6700 for details.