

Factory store is good fit for retailer

BY KIMBERLY MORTISON
STAFF WRITER

A good foundation is important when it comes to a relationship, a business and for Jay Howell's customers — their appearance.

The Garden City businessman, who has worked in the clothing business for the past 30 years, opened Bra Mania March 19, 2002, on Ford Road near Brandt.

"When a woman is wearing a good bra that fits well, they feel good about themselves," store manager Mary Anne Soccil said. "You'd be surprised how many people aren't properly fitted and are wearing the wrong size. I'd say about 99.9 percent."

"People just don't take the time to find out what suits them best."

EXTENSIVE LINE

Bra Mania, a 1,200-square-foot store, features an extensive line of undergarments, including brand names such as Bali, Victoria's Secret, Wonderbra, Olga, Barely There and Goddess (full figure) at discount prices.

"This is an extension of my wholesaling business where I can sell top name brands of intimate apparel at the best prices," said Howell, a Novi resident.

According to Soccil, they also offer a line of dance apparel (leotards, tights, sheer skirts), nursing/maternity garments, thongs, cotton undergarments, bustiers and strapless bras.

In addition to her responsibilities as store manager, Soccil takes measurements to guarantee a better fit and also fills special, bridal and prom orders.

Garden City resident Lynne Martinez noticed the Bra Mania sign driving down Ford Road about a month after the store opened, and since then has become a loyal and familiar shopper.

"They were so friendly and have excellent prices," Martinez said. "I don't think there's a brand in there that I haven't tried. I used to shop around where the sales were, but now I'm there every week, and if I'm not, they're probably wondering where I am."

"They have everything in all the pretty colors, brand names and the size I need. I can spend \$25 there and walk out with three to four bras and a couple of pairs of panties. That \$25 is one bra somewhere else."

INTERNET SALES

To establish a greater client base, Howell said he started looking into Internet sales even before the Garden City store opened. After a great deal of "trial and error," the retailer said they now have a very successful Internet business (www.bramania.com) through the online auctioneer, eBay. Merchandise can be purchased by bid or the "buy it now" option. Howell estimates they average 400 online sales a month.

"We have shipped to customers all over the world including Poland, Paris, Korea, United Kingdom, Taiwan and Canada," Howell said.

As they approach their first anniversary in business, Howell and Soccil say although the media is reporting an economic slump for the retail industry, Bra Mania's sales are up 30 percent and they just had their biggest sales week and month ever. "We're in a good location because of the amount of traffic that travels down Ford Road every day, and Garden City is a good connector community for our customers from Inkster, Livonia, Plymouth, Westland, Redford and Detroit and Dearborn," Howell said.

The Garden City businessman got his start in the retail industry when he worked filling racks of belts at the Hudson's department store on Woodward Avenue in the early 1970s.

Bra Mania is at 29855 Ford Road. Store hours are Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Call (734) 522-5102.

RELIGION CALENDAR

If you want to submit an item for the religion calendar, fax it to (248) 477-9722 or write: Religion Calendar, Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335. The deadline for an announcement to appear in the Thursday edition is noon Monday.

EVENTS

Easter Eggstravaganza

Detroit First Church of the Nazarene will hold an Easter egg hunt 10:30 a.m. Saturday, April 19 at the church, 29260 Haggerty, north of Eight Mile, east of Haggerty.

Lenten Dinners

Mercy Marian Oakland West, located on 10

Mile just east of Middlebelt, will host a Lenten Fish Dinner 4-6:30 p.m. Friday, April 4. The cost is \$7 for adults and \$4.50 for children under 12. Call (248) 474-7204.

Noon Prayer

First United Methodist Church in downtown Farmington will open their sanctuary for prayer during the noon hour on the weekdays. During this time of instability and war, all persons are invited to come and pray.

Jesus Christ Superstar

Salem United Church of Christ in downtown Farmington presents Jesus Christ Superstar at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 11 and 12. The performance will be given by Salem's Youth Group and friends. For reservations

call (248) 474-6880.

Goddess Devl

Columbia University Professor Vidya Dehejia, specialist on the Hindu Goddess Devl, will be the special guest at a dinner gathering, on Saturday, April 12 at the Priya Restaurant in Farmington Hills. To make reservations call (313) 833-3991.

Coffee talk

Single Point Lighthouse Cafe offers an evening of relaxation and fun while listening to live entertainment provided by other Single Pointers. Cost is \$5. Hot dogs, goodies and coffee provided. Call Single Point Ministries at Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 40000 Six Mile Road (near Haggerty).

Northville, at (248) 374-5920.

LENTEN SERVICES

Bethlehem Lutheran

Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills will hold a Wednesday Lenten bible study session 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. April 9. Bring a brown bag lunch. A soup supper will also be held at 6 p.m. with a service following the supper. The church is located at 35300 W. Eight Mile.

ONGOING

Widow/Widower Support
New Hope Center for Grief Support, 8

Christian-based bereavement outreach center, offers support for widows and widowers with children on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The group meets at 7 p.m. at St. Kenneth's Parish offices, 14951 Haggerty, Plymouth. New Hope for Kids meets at the same time and place and is aimed at ages 4-11. (248) 348-0115.

Aglow

Aglow International, a community lighthouse for women, meets for dinner and discussion at 6 p.m. the second Monday of each month at Best Western Executive Hotel, 31525 W. 12 Mile in Farmington. For information or reservations call (248) 476-1053.

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