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Beading helps with coping in Pittsford **Store thrives in tough economic times**

Ernst Lamothe Jr.
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Ann and Sheila Grabowski worried that their niche beading business would suffer as discretionary dollars diminished in a hampered economy. Even though Beads 'N Things had been a staple in the same location for 42 years, they figured tough times would make people keep their wallets shut for nonessential items. But according to the mother and daughter owners, their customers say beading has become a tranquil hobby in difficult times.

"We are not only hanging in there, but we have grown," said Ann Grabowski, 35, a Rochester resident. "We've survived through this economy and we are in a fine position."

Sheila Grabowski, 65, of Rush, is the third person to own and operate the 1,100-square-foot store at 50 State St. in Northfield Commons. She took over on Nov. 1, 1984, turning it into a bead and craft shop. During her tenure of more than two decades, she sometimes reflects on how the whole business might never have happened. When she was younger, Sheila Grabowski wanted to open a yarn store, but having a family took center stage. She then considered starting a Hallmark card business, but that never materialized. Finally, on a Labor Day weekend 26 years ago, she flipped through a newspaper advertisement about the Beads 'N Things business. She decided she was not going to let a third opportunity slip by, and she became the new owner.

Today, the business has evolved even more, branching off to offering beading for weddings. She believes the key to a successful small business is providing a comfortable environment so people want to keep coming back.

"We let people work on their projects sometimes in the store, and they feel relaxed here. Beading seems like something people are doing to get their minds off their troubles," said Sheila Grabowski. "Now we need to get more men involved in beading."

Beads 'N Things still offers custom jewelry, repairs, beadwork classes and instruction books. The duo takes trips to Manhattan to pick up some beadwork, and they say they strive to offer their customers the best.

"As a small business ... our success has to come from word of mouth," said Ann Grabowski. "We depend on our customers being happy and staying happy."

Ann, a former human resources manager for Xerox Corp., joined her mother two years ago to manage the business and the shop's website. "I grew up working in the shop, so it was an easy transition," she said.