

SMALL BUSINESS

Pittsford shop feeds customers' need to bead

Mother and daughter sell materials and do repairs, classes and custom work

By LAURA BROTHERS

Sheila Grabowski let her first opportunity to own a small business pass her by and vowed to seize the next one that came her way.

"I've always had a craving to own my own store," says Grabowski, 66, the owner of Beads 'N Things.

A newspaper advertisement helped her reach that goal. She bought Beads 'N Things in 1984 when it was a general crafts and bead shop. The business is in Northfield Commons, beside the Erie Canal in the village of Pittsford.

PROFILE

Beads 'N Things Inc.

"I walked in and immediately felt comfortable," she says.

In 1995, after realizing that the beads were paying all of the business's expenses, Grabowski took the store back to its roots, selling only beads and related items.

Daughter Ann Grabowski, 36, worked at the shop every summer while growing up. Three years ago she decided to leave the corporate world and join her mother.

Beads 'N Things has become a beading destination; customers from Buffalo, Syracuse and even out of state travel to the shop for all their beading needs. The Grabowskis attribute their expanded customer base to social media advertising.

"It is a whole new aspect of how to promote and grow business," Sheila Grabowski says.

In March, the Grabowskis overcame their initial hesitation and posted a coupon offer on Groupon.com for beading classes. The impact on the business was huge, Ann Grabowski says, and those classes are now booked through October.

Ann Grabowski says classes usually are one-on-one. The Grabowskis are trying to



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Owner Sheila Grabowski, left, and daughter Ann Grabowski offer an expansive variety of beads, including semiprecious stones, freshwater pearls, Swarovski crystals, glass, wood, carved bone and seeds in their Pittsford shop.

offer a similar experience for the Groupon classes by limiting them to a small number of participants.

Sheila Grabowski says she prefers to give instruction over the counter instead of in classes.

"I'd rather they put the money into beads than classes," she says. "A lot of times customers only need a little hint, so they will pop in and get help."

A younger demographic also is starting

to frequent her store, she says. Even in slower times, women come in just to relax and work on their projects.

The store offers an expansive variety of beads, including semiprecious stones, freshwater pearls, Swarovski crystals and items made of glass, wood, carved bone and seeds.

"We get a lot of beads from Czech Republic," Ann Grabowski says. "There are a lot of family-owned bead makers (there)."

The Grabowskis travel to New York City