

At Lexington's Crafty Yankee, it's all about giving

From Lexington Minuteman, Posted August 30,2011

Kathy Fields, owner of The Crafty Yankee specialty gift shop in Lexington Center, sits down with the Lexington Minuteman to talk about her store and her customers.



How do you describe your shop?

Crafty Yankee's focus before was just handcrafted gifts, meaning things from your home, for entertaining, maybe hostess gifts or baby gifts ... What wasn't there other than some jewelry was women's accessories and I could see from what people were buying that they wanted more scarves. They wanted to see more handbags and jewelry, and they wanted to find girlfriend gifts. They wanted a wider selection of "appreciation gifts."

How did you adapt your store?

The people in Lexington, and all my customers, are extremely generous people, and most the purchasing in my store is done for someone else instead of for themselves. That said, I like to call our store "the community giving store." We're in this wonderful community. When people come in here, they are buying a gift for giving to someone else. Many of the gifts that we carry are gifts that give back; [we call them] the gift that keeps on giving. I would buy from fair trade artisans who have quite a few companies where a very large percent of the purchasing price goes to their charity.

What are some items you offer that 'give back?'

We have the Friends of Mel. Mel Simmons was a flight attendant who had breast cancer ... the organization has donated millions to Mass General for helping families affected. We sell this one bracelet and many carry it — a \$20 bracelet and all the money goes back to the foundation. We've raised over \$100,000 alone. We have a jewelry line called Kazuri where the money helps the Masai women of Kenya. I have a fabulous "forget-me-not" flower pin that's all in enamel — it's the symbol of the Alzheimer's Association [and] 100 percent of that money goes to that foundation.

What is the Giving Tree?

The Giving Tree is a tree we set up on a table in the store every Christmas — this is year 17. We get names of seniors in need from Minuteman Senior Services. Basically it's gift cards for seniors — wrapped in a box. My customers come in and take the names because they want to touch one person at a time ... I thank them for their generosity. People come in September and ask when the tree will be up.

My favorite story is one year, we we're open during the holiday season until 8 p.m. and a mom came in with her two kids, maybe a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old. They went over to the tree ... I overheard her with the kids say, "You know each one of you is only going to get one gift this Christmas because Daddy isn't working but there are people out there who are more needy than we are. The money you've picked up from chores, we'll use to buy these gifts." They came back the next week and she made each one come to the counter and introduce themselves. She had a pretty basket of hats and gloves and things like that which she had knit to give to these people, too. That's kind of the way these customers are — they care about people.

How has business been?

We've been pleasantly surprised and I am definitely optimistic in spite of the downturn, people will always show their appreciation to other people. It's just they need to find some more creative ways to do it and so we worked really hard on price points ... For people who don't have as much money and have multiple people to buy for during the holiday, it's amazing how much people can spend. They want to buy something small for a housekeeper or a hairdresser or the dog walker. They can come in here and buy holiday jam, candles, or an ornament — that's always something fun.

Would you say you offer creative options for customers?

That's exactly it. What some people don't remember is we gift-wrap everything for free. My feeling is, if someone is coming into a specialty store, we want to treat them special. Part of that is they are leaving with the package wrapped in a pretty hand-tied bow, in the paper they picked out without having to go find a box, buy the paper...

It's not about selling — you're there to listen. I let them be alone but if you need suggestions, they are shopping with you. The greatest compliment to my staff is when people come back with pictures of friends [with the gifts they purchased]. We really do care. It's a family.