

Your home. Your local news.

Naperville Sun

Businesswoman selling Canterbury Shoppe

By Hilary Decent – As published in the Naperville Sun – September 20, 2009

It's one of the most iconic stores in Naperville -- an Aladdin's cave of unusual gifts, a potpourri of brightly colored, glittering knickknacks set against calming music and the soothing scent of cinnamon.

The Canterbury Shoppe has been loved by residents and visitors alike since it opened almost 13 years ago. It's the perfect place to find that special gift or a delightful spot to pass the time while waiting for a table at neighboring Egg Harbor.

The owner of the store is Naperville resident Gail Bevin, who moved to the Midwest from the East Coast for grad school and never went back. But sadly, ill health has led to her decision to put it up for sale.

I spoke to Gail perched on a beautiful painted stool in the second of her two shops. She opened it in 2005 following the success of the first one directly in front of it on West Jackson Avenue. It was hard not to be distracted by the beautiful trinkets, all carefully ordered and displayed by the staff members who have been with her since the beginning.

Gail's success story took a bitter turn when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007.

"I had chemo, but it wasn't too much trouble," she said. "The doctors thought I had done great."

But earlier this year tests showed the cancer had spread to her liver.

"I became exhausted and it was impossible to work on a daily basis," she said. "But the staff have been great at filling in."

In May she put the store on the market.

"I'm looking for someone who can add their flavor to the store and keep it going, because it is important for the customers here in Naperville," she said. "This is a great time to buy, because it would generate most cash flow. This time of year is best for any retailer."

Gail said she called it the Canterbury Shoppe because it was a traditional name, reflecting the traditional type of goods they sell. Among the most popular items are the sports and school souvenirs, baby goods and a huge selection of Christmas items.

"We have always tried to sell 'different' things," Gail said. "We've always been a gift store. We are bigger than the other accessory stores around here, so we can carry a wider selection. We are known for our Christmas merchandise more than the other stores are, plus we have named artists like Peggy Karr."



Cindy Meals (left), Gail Bevin (center) and Diane Mayr pause among the merchandise in The Canterbury Shoppe.

Submitted by Hilary Decent

Particular favorites are the special Naperville Christmas ornaments. This year, the 13th in the series has been produced.

Although obviously frail, Gail is still keeping positive.

Last year, she married her partner of seven years, Robert, and they have recently returned from a trip back to the East Coast where Gail grew up.

"It was a very exciting time," she said. "We got married partly because I got sick and he said, 'There is no time like the present.'"

Gail will have mixed emotions when the store is finally sold.

"Normally I would have felt this was going to be a big change in my life and I'd be sad," she said. "But given the situation, I will feel relief. I'm not a good candidate for a liver transplant, so I just keep plugging along, taking mega drugs which are supposed to get me better."

Hilary Decent would like to hear your stories about accomplished women in the community. E-mail her at hilarydecent@yahoo.co.uk.