

Designer used hands to fulfill a dream

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When Megan Wray was nine, instead of setting up a lemonade stand to earn a few extra dollars, she would go door to door selling her handmade beaded jewelry. She's not sure whether her neighbours bought her handmade crafts out of politeness or because they were good -- but she managed to make a few dollars and it spawned a dream about a full-time jewelry business.

Now at the age of 28, she wants to contribute to the economy of her hometown of Maple Ridge, helping to revitalize the downtown core.

Last Saturday, she opened her own gift store where she sells necklaces, earrings, and bracelets she has made under her own label Gingerly Designs and high quality, handmade items.

As a high school student at Thomas Haney, Wray would wander past a small shop on 227th Street just north of Lougheed, which usually stood empty, and dream about opening her own store there.

That's the location she chose for her store Gingerly, where she's selling her own jewelry, and handmade cards, bags and other items made by designers from the Lower Mainland, around B.C. and across Canada.

Up until now, her business has been based from her home.

"I find it really inspiring to be here," she said of her small, white store on 227th. "I love things that are bold and simple - you can see that in the store."

In 2004, Wray was debating whether to go back to school to study communications or start a business - she comes from a family of entrepreneurs and her grandfather was a silversmith, so it seemed like a natural fit to start a jewelry business.

The store is designed to be a "one-stop shop," Wray said, where gift wrapping is free and handmade cards are for sale.

Wray carries vintage-stitch fabric cards by Rikrak and Sunlit Letterpress cards, which are made using vintage letterpresses from the 1920s.

Rikrak also makes fabric bags and wallets. Other designers include Filou, Bespoke, Patina, Lemonade Tree, Bumblesea and Flight Path.

Wray doesn't have any formal training in jewelry design but has been learning over the years - she uses natural products like agate, sea bamboo, tiger ebony wood and all the clasps in her jewelry are handmade from sterling silver.

After her second year in business, she started making a regular fall line and spring line, and starting going to the Vancouver Gift Show where she would network with other local designers and retailers.

Her jewelry is also sold by 20 retailers across North America.

As a small business owner in Maple Ridge, Wray would like to see the downtown area become more pedestrian-friendly with more small businesses so residents could shop locally.

"Can't we benefit our local community?" Wray said. "I really want to see our commercial base grow."

The District of Maple Ridge could limit the types of stores in the downtown area, for example, like Pitt Meadows which doesn't allow cheque-cashing outlets in their community, Wray said.

Gingerly is located at 11869 - 227 St. in Maple Ridge. More information can be found at gingerlydesigns.com.

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