

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



Owner Andrea Ragin, with daughter Michelle and their puppy, Lily.

"My mother always told me to wear sensible shoes." Many a woman has heard this phrase, and heeded the implied warning. Books on how to have a successful interview suggest that if you're wearing a nice suit, but fail to wear the right shoes, it can ruin your look - lessening your chances of getting the job; and lots of people adhere to the familiar adage, "no white shoes after Labor Day". It all goes to show... shoes *are* important.

Until just over a year ago, however, Bainbridge offered virtually no place specializing specifically in shoes. Though local clothing retail stores would offer the occasional styles, there was no local shoe store, and hadn't been one, for more than ten years.

Enter newly transplanted Bainbridge resident, Andrea Ragin. Her husband Pat, had commuted between their hometown of Atlanta Georgia, where she worked as a pediatric home care nurse, and Seattle for nearly ten years while working in the property management industry. When they decided to move their family to Washington, Bainbridge seemed ideal. And, after living on the island for just two years, Andrea longed to do something connected to the community.

"I considered a gift store," said Andrea, "but didn't feel that was a necessity". Nearly six months after the idea to open a shoe store had first occurred, a space became available in downtown Winslow. Because of the demand for retail space, a quick decision had to be made and the deal was sealed.

Renovating the space, (previously the home of a frame shop then a dive shop) proved to be a challenge because of the bright color scheme, painted flooring and false walls erected to accommodate different types of businesses.

Quickly, Andrea and her entire family including sons Marc and Ben, daughter Michelle, and nephew Bryan began the transformation process.

Husband Pat created cleverly constructed display shelves with hidden storage underneath to store swiftly arriving inventory.

The ordering of that initial inventory proved to be another challenge. Having never operated a retail business before, Andrea had to make decisions about the styles her future customers would desire - without knowing who those customers might be. She joined the National Association of Shoe Retailers and attended her first trade show in New York City.

And it seems that after a year, her intuition has paid off. The nearly 800 customers on the stores mailing list, attest to the fact that she is doing something right. "People here are interested in comfortable rather than transitional fashion."

To meet this demand Magnolias carries a range of brands known for high quality and exceptional comfort, including Dansko, Donald Pliner and Cole Haan. These lines are built to stand up to the northwest climate in style. A real strong point for the store is that they provide not only a wide range of styles, but also varying price points. Prices range from \$20 to \$200, and fancy shoes are available all year long. "Many stores take the glitzy heels off the shelf after the prom or holiday seasons, but the truth is that people have events all year long which may call for formal shoes, so we always have a variety in stock."

In addition to shoes, Magnolias carries handbags, wallets and purses by popular designer, Tusk, as well as stockings from Donald Pliner, and unique clothing and jewelry from select local artists.

In June, Magnolias began carrying men's shoes, belts and socks. "We have styles ranging from young contemporary and business casual by labels such as Steve Madden, to designers like Cole Haan." Again, this addition was in response to seeing a need for a suitable source for men's shoes without having to travel to Seattle or beyond.

Indeed, with nearly 100 styles throughout the store, there is no reason to go anywhere else. Besides the fabulous styles, you can enjoy the satisfaction of supporting a local business, and receive customer service that rivals larger off-island stores.

"We are happy to do special orders," says Andrea. We also offer gift certificates in any amount, and we keep a "wish book". The wish book is a way to make shopping easier for friends and family. You jot down the styles and brands you like, then prospective gift-givers can come in and easily find exactly what you want. Many stores do this type of "wish book" just around the holidays, but ours is here year round, and is a great resource for birthdays, anniversaries, and graduation."

To celebrate the success of it's first year, Magnolia's on Madison will be holding an anniversary party in October. Watch for details coming soon!

MAGNOLIAS
ON MADISON
a shoe store and more

