

In downtown, things are looking up

By Jennifer Bell/It's Your Business Too

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Salem -

SALEM - Downtown Salem is running out of retail space. Those of you who have not been downtown recently may find this hard to believe, but the days of the empty storefront in downtown Salem is rapidly coming to an end.

There is a new energy and vitality to the downtown. Not only is Salem a major tourist attraction, but it is the premier dining destination on the North Shore. New businesses are opening up in Salem practically every week. Where Roosevelts stood empty, a new restaurant, Spirits has opened. Sixty-two on Wharf, the hot new restaurant on Pickering Wharf, just opened this last month to rave reviews.

Salem attracts more than a million people to the downtown every year. You can find live music in downtown Salem every weekend at area restaurants and now at Gulu-Gulu, a Bohemian café/club open to 1 a.m. If you want to find out what is going on, take a look at www.stanslist.com where many of the weekly music events are listed.

Salem is increasingly becoming known as a shopping destination as well. Sacred Gear, a high-end denim store for men and women, is expected to open early April at the corner of Essex and Washington Street. Signatures clothing store just expanded and relocated to Essex Street next to Bernard's jewelry store. At almost 4,000 square feet of retail space, Signatures feels like a department store. They carry not only a broad selection of clothing for women of all ages, but handbags, sleepwear, accessories and now shoes.

You can continue shoe shopping just across Essex Street at the Bootery, which stocks a wide array fashionable shoes. Very soon, Witch's Hide — featuring leather jackets, wallets and handbags — will also be located in this stretch of Essex Street. A shopping trip in Salem would not be complete without a stop at J. Mode on Front Street for high-end fashion. The Peabody Essex Museum Shop also displays a variety of clothing items for women. Don't forget to stop by the Army Barracks for your active outdoor gear. For clothing for infants and toddlers, you can choose from Crunchy Granola Baby on Washington Street and Chulamama on Derby Street. Last I checked, there were even hand-painted baby clothes at The Cows Meow on Pickering wharf.

Also, on Pickering Wharf, Quintessentials carries lovely hats and scarves for women. Should your tastes run a bit retro, stop into Modern Millie on Washington Street for lovely vintage wear. If you are looking for a souvenir T-shirt or sweatshirt — the possibilities are practically endless from Witch Tees in the Museum Place Mall to Trolley Depot, Salemdipity, Coons and beyond.

Part of the excitement for businesses owners are the many large construction projects downtown Salem. In the old Tompkins furniture store building a new mixed-use space has emerged, Latitude, with condos on the upper floors and shops on the first floor. A young entrepreneur opening a new furniture store is expected to take one of the front spots. The former Salem News building, now just a memory, is making way for a very exciting new mixed-use building on the corner of New Derby Street and Washington Street. Then there is the Old Salem Jail and courthouse projects, which promise to bring even more people shopping and dining in the downtown.

If you are thinking of starting a new business in Salem, don't hesitate. The time is now. If you would like information or assistance in opening a new business downtown Salem, contact me, Jennifer Bell. I am happy to help.

Salem is a business-friendly community with lots of great resources for businesses including the Enterprise Center at Salem State College. Salem, check it out!

Jennifer Bell, Salem Main Streets Manager, is a native of Lancaster, Pa. She and her husband, Daryl moved to Salem in October 2005 from Alexandria, Va. where she worked with many historic homes and museums. They have a son, Jedidiah, who is 10 months old. Jennifer has extensive experience in educational nonprofit work and came to Main Streets after serving as director of the Posse Foundation, a scholarship program in Boston. She is a history buff and loves fishing, hiking and canoeing.

"It's Your Business Too" is a column written by staffers at Main Streets and the Chamber of Commerce. It appears regularly to the Salem Gazette's Business pages.