



December 18, 2009

Beyond the mall: 'Countrypoliton' a hit at Chili shop

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After 35 years in the retail business, Mary Chalmers is no stranger to change. To keep ahead of trends in gift accessories, Chalmers goes to shows in Atlanta to stock her store, The Glue Factory in Chili.

The 6,500-square-foot gift shop is filled with goodies such as Vera Bradley handbags, Willow Tree angels and place settings for every occasion.

"We have all the top retail lines," says Chalmers, 66.

Chalmers opened the shop with the intention of providing quality products at affordable prices. When she opened, she was a young mother with four children, so the shop was also a way for her to have a career while taking care of her family.

The Glue Factory started in a strip mall across the street before Chalmers decided to build the standalone site. Customers can spend hours browsing through the cavernous store, which regularly updates its inventory.

Rush resident Jodi Connell, 40, regularly buys gifts at The Glue Factory, having selected Vera Bradley and Willow Tree for her friends and family.

"They have an amazing selection," she says, adding that there are very few gift stores of that size.

Chalmers has changed the style of the store over the years from primitive country to what is now known in the home décor industry as "countrypoliton": upscale, sophisticated country. One of the more popular lines in that countyopolitan genre is Grassland Roads tableware, Chalmers says.

Melissa and Doug educational toys are also popular with her clients. As a gift shop, it's important to carry items that are different from the big box stores, she adds.

Customers travel from as far away as Buffalo to shop at The Glue Factory, Chalmers says. They often make a day of it, having lunch at Jitters Café across the street and spending time browsing The Glue Factory.

"It's a destination place," Chalmers says.

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This is part four of five in our Beyond the Mall series.
