

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

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In Mt. Clemens, business owners start small, eventually reinvest in downtown



Photo by Edward Maurer for Crain's Detroit Business The Apple of my Eye statue in downtown Mt. Clemens.

Here's the third in a series of snapshots of downtowns around Southeast Michigan.

By Laura Cassar

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of snapshots of downtowns around Southeast Michigan. [Read about downtown Plymouth and downtown Rochester.](#)

Read more about downtown Mt. Clemens and its economic development strategy [here.](#)

For Mt. Clemens vintage boutique owner Diane Kubik, the business plan is simple: "keep the doors open."

Ten years ago Kubik was shopping — and dreaming — with her sister in Mt. Clemens. They passed an empty storefront and talked about how fun it would be to open a store. At the time, they had no business plan. They used \$5,000 from a home equity loan and opened **Max & Ollie's Vintage Boutique** in a 312-square-foot location on Pine Street. Three years ago the business moved to a 1,200-square-foot location on Macomb Street in the heart of the city, across from Fountain Stage.

"We didn't know the first thing about anything," said Kubik, 57, a native Detroit, adding that it was the **Mt. Clemens Downtown Development Authority** and the other business owners that helped during those first months. "That support is crucial when you're new and don't know what you're doing. We wouldn't have made it a year in a strip mall."

The store encourages customers to "play dress up" and post their photos on Facebook. In exchange, they get to pick a trinket from the reward basket. "The DDA had a Facebook Boot Camp to help businesses increase their Internet



activity," Kubik said. "The DDA keeps an eye on us, helps give us ideas on what works and what doesn't."

Beyond Borders

Lisa Taylor, 47, had worked for **Borders** for 18 years when the store closed and she lost her job in 2011.

"I woke up at 3 a.m. and said to my husband, 'Here's a crazy idea, what if we opened a used book store?'"

Her husband liked the idea, even more so when vinyl was added to the mix.

Taylor, a fan of The Beatles, said she "loves records and books just as much" and was willing to share her space with her husband's **Weirdville Records**.

Taylor's last day at Border's was April 23, 2011. She opened **PaperBack Writer** that May.



Photo by Laura Cassar PaperBack Writer shares its space with Weirdville Records.

Then one night, out bowling with friends, he "stumbled on Mt. Clemens." The location that now houses his **Orleans Sports Cafe** had a moving sign and his wife, Debbie, looked at the property through the window and said, "This is it." Boone said they mortgaged everything they had and in 1996 opened the restaurant on Macomb Place, just 10 days after their baby was born. Although Mt. Clemens wasn't part of the original plan, it turns out it suited the Boones just fine. When Debbie Boone and a couple friends decided they needed feather bowling "on this side of town," their Orleans landlord heard and offered them the building that is now **Bath City Bistro**.

It took a year and a half to remodel the building. They cleared out 45 10-yard dumpsters in the process, which included tearing out the second floor apartments, hand grinding and acid washing the brick interior and cutting windows out of brick walls.

Bath City Bistro opened in October of 2000. It includes three lanes of feather bowling — the lanes are made of ground-up tennis shoes.

Now Boone would like to invest even more in the city he stumbled upon; he'd like to open an Irish pub.

"It makes sense," he said. "The more places there are, the more people come."

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Photo by Laura Cassar Diane Kubik, owner of Max & Ollie's Vintage Boutique in Mt Clemens, is celebrating her 10 year anniversary in business.

"I thought I'd sign a three year lease and see what happened," Taylor said.

She used \$5,000 from her 401k; friends who worked with her at Borders donated books to get her started. "They'd bring them in like boxes of puppies and ask that I give them a good home."

Taylor bought book cases from a Borders liquidation sale. They started with 950 square feet of space and by August of 2014 needed to move into a larger, 2,900 square foot location on Macomb Place, next to **Max & Ollie's**.

Taylor, who grew up in Utica, now lives in Mt. Clemens. She enjoys the history of the city and the ability to walk or ride her bike to work.

Her advice to potential small business owners is to love what you sell, "share your passion," and to provide service that can't be found in a big box store.

Bar and feather bowling

Mt. Clemens was not part of Paul Boone's original plan.

Living in Harrison Township, Boone looked up and down Gratiot for a location to open a bar and restaurant modeled after Royal Oak's **Fifth Avenue**. He couldn't find anything.



Photo by Laura Cassar Paul Boone, owner of Bath City Bistro and Orleans Sports Cafe in Mt Clemens, enjoys the historical decor of his bistro.

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