

Gift shop marks 75th year

Mark Roberts
Lighthouse staff

CHESTER — The Warp and Woof Gifts and Gallery and the Sweater Annex in Chester is celebrating 75 years in business as Nova Scotia's oldest giftshop.

The Water Street giftshop is now owned by John Shearson and Gwen Dueck, who purchased the business from Ann Flinn early in 1995.

Although the name has changed slightly, from the Warp and Woof Gifts and Thing-a-Bobs, the historical charm of the giftshop hasn't. Warp and Woof is a weaving term.

Historical details are sketchy, and sometimes change according to who one talks to. The giftshop seems to have evolved from Susan's Shoppe, which was opened by Susan Mitchell, who married to become Susan Daley. The shop was located at the current site of Flowers, Flowers, Flowers of Chester.

Murray Barkhouse purchased the shop just after the Second World War. He changed the name and was well-known for selling practical items. He also sold real estate out of the shop. Ann Flinn moved the giftshop to the current site of the Warp and Woof, which was previously a garage for the village electric utility, and added the sweater annex.

John says, "It's important to give her credit. She built the Warp and Woof up from a tiny business to a well-loved business in this town."

Both John and Gwen are previous Ontario residents who followed their careers as bankers to New York City. They lived there for 11 years. John, however, has lots of experience with Chester.

"I spent my summers here when I was young. I started coming here in 1946. My mother's family is from Halifax."

They planned to move back to Canada, but, until the couple saw the Warp and Woof the move was still in the future.

They saw the Warp and Woof while looking for land on which to build their retirement home.

Gwen says, "The more we looked around, the bigger our eyes got."

John says, "The opportunity presented itself and we decided to check out of the big urban lifestyle and take up a different lifestyle by the ocean. Living by the ocean is the main attraction."

John laughs when the phrase retirement hobby comes up.

"People say, 'You're retired,' but yesterday I spent a 15 hour day here so it's difficult to describe this as retirement."

They purchased the Warp and Woof for many reasons, including reputation, quality of product and location.

Gwen says, "It's fun. It's been a great experience so far. One reason is the type of people that shop here. They're interesting."

John agrees. "Wonderful, wonderful people."

Gwen says their primary customer base is the South Shore, Halifax, the Annapolis Valley and the Municipality of Chester. Many Halifax people, she says, come to Chester on day trips to shop at the store and the village's other unique shops.

"We've had comments that, in comparison to other little towns, every shop in Chester is different."

John says, "We are continuing the tradition Ann Flinn so well established for people coming here year after year to see beautiful Chester. It's part of the Chester experience."

Gwen says their selection, like previous owners before them, offers something for everyone.

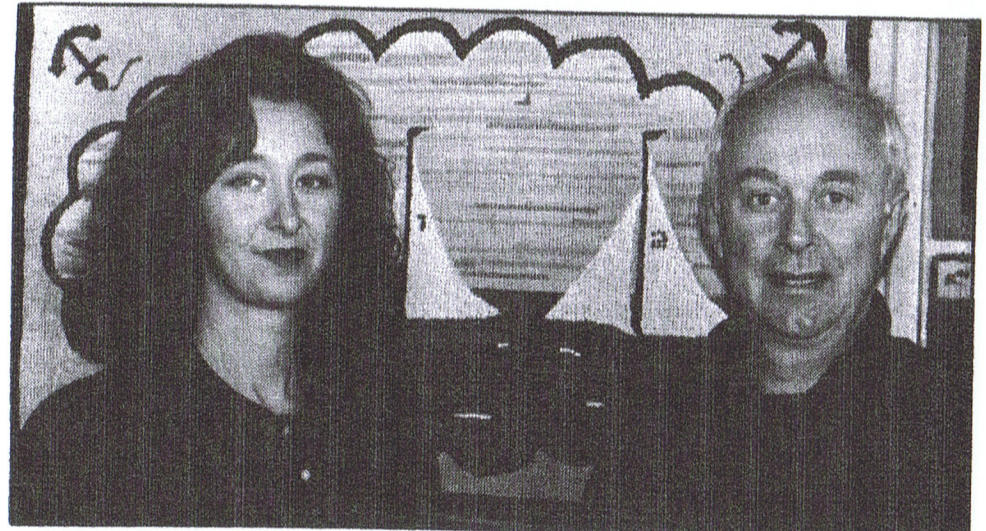
"People can come in here and spend \$10 or they can spend \$5,000 on a Joseph Purcell original."

John agrees. "We have a great variety of local and imported gifts that changes every year."



Mark Roberts photo

The Warp and Woof Gifts and Gallery and the Sweater Annex in Chester is celebrating 75 years in business as Nova Scotia's oldest giftshop.



Mark Roberts photo

John Shearson and Gwen Dueck, the owners of Warp and Woof Gifts and Gallery and the Sweater Annex in Chester, are celebrating 1996 as the 75th anniversary of Nova Scotia's oldest giftshop.