

## Downtown Business Growth

By Catherine Dean

Over the past year, the overall landscape of downtown Milledgeville has not changed. A few businesses have left, while new ones with a more service-based approach moved in to replace those lost.

“Entrepreneurs are constantly evolving as our community and trends change,” said Carlee Schulte, executive director for the city of Milledgeville’s Main Street/Downtown Development Authority. “Businesses develop more flexible models when filling a niche need.”

Although retail shops and restaurants continue to pull people to downtown, a few new businesses seek to supply unique experiences for clients.

“We have three new service-based business that fulfills specific wants and needs within our community-Mod Podge Mama, The Roost, and The Apothecary,” said Schulte.

The Roost, located at 133 East Hancock, is the brick and mortar space for Codee Rainey Designs, a graphic and interior design business owned by Codee and Ross Rainey. Her studio occupies the rear half of the building while the front space is available for small gatherings such as meetings, baby showers, and personal consultations.

“We are now finishing up renovations we started last August,” said Rainey. “I conduct most of my interior design business online and at the home or business of my client. There are no specific hours of operation at The Roost for that reason.”

Rainey says the renovation of the site has gone so beautifully that she wanted to share it with the community by offering it as rental space. She will eventually fill the front area with custom designs. She added, “I look forward to creating a showroom for my custom interior designs, but, that will take a while to achieve.”

Located at 116 North Wayne, The Mod Podge Mama is a combined art studio, exhibit space, and a venue for private art events and classes. Art camps for children will also be held at the location this summer.

The business is owned by life-long artist Susan Bergeron who wanted to create a local center for learning how to create and exhibit art. She wanted to offer services that most people traveled to other cities, such as Athens and Augusta, to receive.

The Apothecary is the office of realtor and historic preservationist Ross Sheppard. Located at 125 South Wayne, the facility is a collaborative workspace that is available to rent for events as well as cottage industry endeavors.

Another business new to downtown is Miles of Styles, a high-end resale boutique which relocated to 134 South Wayne from North Columbia/441. “I am overall pleased with the move away from the speedway of 441,” said owner Heidi Martin. “I would recommend to city officials

that more focus could be placed on the businesses of Wayne Street. A lot of foot traffic stays on Hancock, and so many wonderful shops occupy Wayne.”

Milledgeville Main Street consistently works to attract new businesses to downtown through financial incentives. One such program is the 50/50 Façade Match-a program to improve the outside appearances of the occupied buildings. Proceeds from the annual Deep Roots festival completely funds the grant program.

In addition to the successful Deep Roots festival, Main Street holds other events throughout the year that boost business as well as provide residents and visitors a fun and entertaining time. One upcoming occasion that is growing every year is the Hometown Celebration being held on May 4.

“It is essentially just a block party for the community to come together, listen to music, enjoy our downtown and celebrate our historic downtown,” says Schulte.

Despite a few businesses closing or relocating outside of downtown, progress has been made, especially in the renovation of spaces that were not previously available for purchase or rent. Blackbird Coffee owners, Jimmy and Iona Holder, have renovated the connecting space next to their business for this purpose.

“They renovated the space specifically to attract new business to downtown,” said Schulte. Schulte continues to be positive about the gains made by the historic town center.

“Downtown has continued to improve over the past ten years. Although we do see some businesses closing, the past several years we still have had a net gain of businesses in our downtown, despite any closings,” adds Schulte. “We have a good mix of businesses right now, and I think that is such a positive attribute for any downtown.”