

## Local boutique Creek Side Clothing a real Orangeville success story



By Constance Scrafield

It was an idea, a dream stored in the back of her mind, but in her career otherwise, Kelly Warren, owner of Creek Side Clothing since 2012, never held a job that would steer her into a retail business.

'All the way back,' she began her own history in an interview with the Citizen, 'I had nothing to do with retail, although I was in customer service. I worked for a service, career counselling and corporate training for 12 years, in the city. I worked with companies that were downsizing in the '90's. We were very busy. I was a facilitator.

We had an outpost for counselling executives for their next opportunity.

'Then, I got pregnant with our second child and I didn't want to do that travelling any more. We lived in the country, in the Headwaters area. I retired with a package- I had advanced to management with 25 people working under me.

'Six months later, a colleague called me to work with them, to work from home on leadership development. That suited me perfectly. I did that for several years ' doing profile work.'

It was time to shift: 'I applied to work with the Career Centre with Georgian College, with Employment Ontario, here in Orangeville. I also taught on the academic side to PSW (Personal Service Workers), helping them help themselves. I did personalities assessment, taught them how to write resumes. We held job fairs for people, organizations, looking for PSW's. There were 30 students with a load of opportunities.'

A smile lit her face, 'I had shopped at Kettle Creek Clothing. Their head office went out of business and the person who worked here took it over and called it Creek Side. I still shopped here and became friends with the owner, Karen.

'Then, one day she called me to say she was going to close the shop.'

The long-held dream/idea came forward to confront her fears, 'I was way too afraid to open a shop. My husband was working shifts. Karen had very little inventory; the lease on the shop was up.

'We met for coffee. 'I have an idea,' I told her. 'It's your baby but would you sell it to me? I even told her, 'Why don't you go for a run and think about it?' She called me a couple of days later, to say, 'Let's do it.'

'My husband said to me, 'You've always wanted to do it.'

'My kids are athletes. We're having meeting with a coach who wants to talk to my daughter. I do a lot of driving . My staff are wonderful. I couldn't do it without them. We totally renovated the store four years ago; it was a bit dark; I kept the name of the shop and the hanger in the logo which I have modernized. We have a big presence on social media. We painted and re-did the store.'

She pointed out an antique table in the middle of the store, on which stood a full sized manikin, wearing a flowered dress and a half body mannikin with an elegant two tone sweater.

'That's a family dining room table,' she informed us. 'My dad raised the table legs up a so that the table top wouldn't bang him on his legs. Nice to have something of my dad here.'

She looked out the window and, 'I just want to say owning a business in a small town, we have amazing customers. Sometimes, they just come in for coffee. A gentleman who I see at the gym was walking by and came back with a latte for me.

'I said, How'd you know how I take it?' 'Oh, I just asked them and they knew...'

She said, 'Some were regulars before I bought the place and I take care of those customers. People come in with an outfit we've posted on Instagram, 'Where's this outfit?' And we find it.'

It is all about the purchasing, admittedly the trickiest end of any business, 'When I first took over, there were brands here and I rushed out to meet them and met other reps. We do some trade shows but only to make appointments to meet them later.

'I do get in new lines, particularly if they're Canadian. Some that I've had for a few years. Sometimes, I get rid of old lines. I do all the buying, thinking about the different shapes. I try to find things for petit ladies, even though I don't carry petit sizes, as such. I love good scarves - one of the best ways to dress something up is to put on a good scarf.'

When the seasons change, Ms. Warren puts last season's items on sale for 40% and 50% off - until they are pretty well all gone.

'We always have jeans, Bamboo tank tops and leggings,' she affirmed.

Ms. Warren and her customers love her in-store events. She holds customer appreciation nights at the beginning of the spring season, with great prizes to give away.

'My suppliers donate the prizes,' she informed us. 'they're really amazing about that. We have people dropping food for the food bank.

The first Sunday in December, Creek Side holds a 'gift exchange day for Family Transition Place.'

The idea is that Ms. Warren calls FTP to ask what they need for gifts for the people in the shelter at the moment. Then, she passes that list onto their regular customers via their newsletter on Facebook. In exchange for the gifts her customers bring for FTP, Creek Side offers 20% off in the store - 'unlimited,' she promised.

'My staff and I have a lot of fun and we're really different in size and shapes. We're also very honest with our customers. After all, it's only a deal if you're going to wear it. I think we try really hard to fit a person to something they like.

'We're really good at our customer service. Boutique shopping is a little different. We chat to them but we don't follow them. Somebody wants help - or not.'

Looking into a glass cabinet, she noted, "The jewellery we carry is all Canadian made." Various metals, higher and lower prices, all fitting in with the store and merchandise.

She even has vegan purses, "funky designs," she calls them, "made of recycled materials."

"I think I just got really lucky. Most of the time, I just feel lucky. I get time with my daughters. They are both elite soccer players - one plays on provincial rugby. This shop is my social life as well. I think keeping busy helps keep you well."