



Old Town General Store

RHEA VAN ATTA'S OLD
TOWN RETAIL BOUTIQUE
SPREADS THE MICHIGAN
AND LANSING LOVE

Photos and Story by Phil Eich,
Storyville Social, as part of the
Michigan Main Street Story
Series

"I feel like the Old Town General Store is an extension of myself: it's everything I love and enjoy. I love local people, farms, and wine, and it feels kind of like walking into my house. The vibe is very friendly and open, and I treat my employees like family. That's a pretty common vibe here in Old Town Lansing.

I've always wanted to have a business here. When my family immigrated to Michigan from the Philippines, we lived right off Turner Street. This is my old neighborhood: I have a lot of history here, I've made friends here, and I remember all the old stores. I watched this area deteriorate,

but then I watched its revitalization. I wanted to be part of that.

I was looking for a building I could afford that wasn't too big. We were walking by this place around the Fourth of July, and somebody had just put up a 'For Sale' sign in the front window. What really made me want this space was the little courtyard in the back. We called and within a week, we closed on the deal. The time was right, and I knew the universe was telling me, 'This is the opportunity.' It was so exciting!

I knew I wanted to work with local vendors and farms,

so when we first opened the store, we did a survey of this area and found it was a food desert.

The business began as a mini grocery store to fill that need, sourcing food from local farms and vendors and also organic and naturally processed foods. But, after about two years, I realized I couldn't survive because it wasn't sustainable. There wasn't enough space and I couldn't offer enough of the things that people wanted from only local farms. I had to add hard goods and gifts and all the stuff that's less perishable to continue as a business, and that's how we became what we are today.

Today, we focus on Michigan-made products, Michigan-themed products, quality, and affordability. We're becoming pretty well known for our Michigan-made gift baskets: you walk in, choose the components for your gift baskets, and we'll put it together for you. I just love to see what people come up with. And, if you don't have time, you can give me a budget and I'll pick things and put it together for you.

I am really pleased with how Old Town Lansing has progressed. It's a very inclusive place, a place where you can come and not be judged. You can find unique shops that offer different things, and at each store, you will most likely run into the owner.

It's nice knowing who the owner is, and often, the store owners will know your name. That gives the business a personal feel that I think is so important.

This business is not just about money for me; it's about relationships. Even in this age where everybody is so into their devices, we still want human connection. Being a part of this community of really great merchants, people who really care about what they do, it energizes you.

-Rhea Van Atta, owner of Old Town General Store, Old Town Lansing



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