

Local Services for Valentine's Day

Written by Kathleen McCarthy
Tuesday, 12 February 2002 18:00

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Several weeks ago, I wrote about two locally owned businesses that I recently discovered. This week I want to talk about three locally and woman-owned enterprises that I have been doing business with for many years, and make for good ideas for Valentine's Day or any occasion.

The first is Karen's Creations in Moline. Karen Payne is a Seamstress, whose talent has made possible not only the salvation of many beloved clothing items, but also the creation of others that rival any in the fashion realm. Karen has been designing, creating, altering, and restoring clothing since 1993. Her portfolio also includes spectacular wedding gowns, complete with complex and detailed beadwork that rivals the finest bridal boutiques. Her services include tailoring, altering, pattern design, and custom haute couture.

Once Karen copied a dress from scratch using the original as the pattern, without undoing a single stitch. It fit like a dream, a remarkable feat considering she made it using an entirely different type of material. Imagine what she can do with a pattern! There has yet to be a sewing challenge Karen wouldn't tackle. She has a terrific sense of humor and is fun to work with precisely because she is so able to do the impossible when asked. Karen is the consummate problem-solver. Plus she is always tolerant of fashion ideas I spring on her that belong in the Book of Loons. She has refitted all manner of clothing to accommodate the laws of gravity; made right what less talented seamstresses made wrong; and generally contributed to my well-being by saving countless favorite clothes from the ravages of time.

Not only is Karen extraordinarily talented and creative, with the patience of Job, she is supremely diplomatic. Not once, in all these years, has she countered my argument that poorly sewn seams are the cause of clothes not fitting smoothly, with the possibility that cellulite is to blame. She has never rejected my theory that dry cleaning shrinks certain fabrics in favor of the reality that I've grown two sizes in weight. She is always gentle, kind, sympathetic, and willing to do what she can to preserve my delusions that I'm still a size six in a mislabeled size ten. For this alone I treasure her.

West End Gardens is a floral shop in West Davenport owned by Sue Cunningham since 1988. I learned of Sue's shop through my grandmother, who used West End Gardens for most

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occasions. Sue delivers the most gorgeous floral arrangements and plants I have ever seen. She is a master at her craft of arranging and presenting flowers and greens in breathtaking sprays of color, texture, and style. Her arrangements always stand apart from the rest because they are so artful and beautifully designed. Her shop also includes wedding supplies, tux rentals, dry cleaning, and bridal alterations.

Sue is always insightful about occasions and extremely helpful in determining the most appropriate arrangement to send. Most of all she is reliable, compassionate, and gifted. She always goes that extra mile (sometimes literally to make a delivery herself) to ensure that the flowers and greens are healthy, lovely to behold, and long lasting.

When my grandmother passed, Sue sent an arrangement so classically beautiful that my family was deeply touched by what they knew on sight would have thrilled and delighted my grandmother. Honestly, you can't buy that kind of caring.

The third enterprise is the Merry Maids in Bettendorf. Owner Pat Hannah and her two daughters operate the service. Once again, Pat and her merry maids started with my Grandma, who loved them dearly. I took up where Grandma left off when she moved permanently to Arizona.

My lifestyle is so hectic and the paper absorbs most of my time. Domestic things absolutely get a back seat in terms of priorities. The Merry Maids customize their services to fit the varying needs of their clients. In my case, it is affordable because they come once a month and take care of the major cleaning chores, such a floors, appliances, baths, etc. It is a huge relief to have this taken care of. Their schedule also forces me to get things organized at least once a month so they can operate. The service is invaluable to me. For some of their clients, the Merry Maids take care of far more, and their pricing is based on the extent of the service they provide. In the end is all about the time they save me. And it never fails, when I walk into the house after the Merry Maids have been there, it is refreshing, clean, and feels immeasurably good.

All these women personify the best in business. They are always professional, but transcend the transaction with a personal effort and caring that makes doing business with them as much a privilege as a pleasure.

Public Input on the Rise

Davenport citizens were invited to attend Thursday's presentations by three land use-planning firms, who were the finalists of eight companies responding to the city's Request for Proposal (RFP) for the 220 acres at 53rd Street and Eastern Avenue.

The RFP emphasized citizen involvement in determining what and how the city-owned property would develop, and the planners' proposals all reflected this priority. The public can look forward to various opportunities for their input relative to this long awaited project.

Similarly, on Sunday the public was invited to participate in an open house to view the renderings by four architects depicting their respective visions for a skybridge across River

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Drive, connecting the planned River Music History Center and the new parking ramp to the Mississippi River and surrounding area.

Two of the concepts were exciting, bringing alive the possibilities for a visually exciting and pedestrian-intriguing walkway, not to mention a unique experience for viewing and interacting with the area's environmental jewel—the Mississippi. It suddenly became apparent that the skybridge could be much more than just an elevated pedestrian bridge. It has the potential to be a destination itself, beyond just functional connectivity, through architectural aesthetics, environmental interaction, programming that relates to and interfaces with the amenities around it, and a spectacular visual experience overlooking the expansive Mississippi and the cities' skylines.

Such was the vision of our own Quad City talent, Gere Dismer Architects. Their concept included a cantilever-type structure that extended to the river's edge with a large observation platform for visitors to contemplate river life and all its intrigues. The skybridge's design could accommodate other programming as well, including exhibits. Most importantly, the design is about connecting people to the river, a concept that is profound when you consider how stimulating this could be for the community.

The other design that was compelling included a "motion" skybridge design that was highly creative. It had a Calatrava sort of feel to it, very modern, sleek, and clean. It would most definitely serve the purpose of crossing the highway in a dramatic, highly stylized manner.

As for the other two design concepts, they were functional, but about as imaginative as Mississippi mud. This is not to say that these architects are not supremely qualified for the project because they definitely are. So naturally, one of these two architects was chosen for our new skybridge. It was reported that the selection committee's choice was based more on the firm rather than the design. If this is the case, then it is an insult to the other architects who in good faith produced designs as the primary criterion for the selection process.

On a brighter note, the biggest concept on display during Sunday's open house was the irrefutable fact that we proudly have as much, if not more, talent in the Quad Cities as anywhere else. Gere Dismer should be celebrated for its efforts. In this citizen's opinion, they stole the show. Exactly how the public will influence the final skybridge design remains to be seen. We had an opportunity to view them in some detail during Sunday's open house, but the methodology in place to weigh in on each design appears to have been fairly subjective. Since the city's interviews with each architect took place Monday, it is unlikely that the public's feedback influenced the choice for an architect.

Meanwhile DavenportOne had its four public forums on the River Music History Center on Saturday. While the turnout was not large, it was huge in great brainstorming. Ideas included a state-of-the-art venue akin to Chicago's House of Blues that supported both local and touring musicians; workshops and mentoring programs for children and adults; establishment of a Local Hall of Fame; partnerships with other music venues in the Quad Cities to create a larger experience; partnerships with the Figge Art Center and Smithsonian for appropriate and adaptive exhibits and programming; the establishment of a recording studio, where local

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musicians can record their music for future commercial purposes; a radio and web broadcasting network that exports our brand of what river music means.

Everyone agreed that the River Music History Center should include all types of music, as well as appeal to all age groups. There is some concern, however, that if we are going to be an authentic historic center for river music, certain constraints necessarily apply.

On Friday, February 8, consultant Reay presented his rough concepts for the center to a small group that included the four architects for the skybridge under the guise of giving the architects direction and guidance for their drawings about how the building should interact with the skybridge. This rationale is suspect, considering the architects' designs were basically completed because the open house was only two days away, and the interviews with the city to choose the architect were that following Monday.

There is no question that the design of the skybridge should be consistent with the design and functionality of the River Music History Center, and the Figge Arts Center for that matter. DavenportOne, the City of Davenport, and the Museum Foundation should all be collaborating on the three projects as they clearly impact one another. But this collaboration should logically begin in earnest now that the final architect has been chosen for the skybridge. Presenting concepts for the center last Friday that will in all probability change if the public's input is truly to be considered was a waste of time and money at this premature juncture, especially when three of the four architects were lame ducks, so to speak. Expectations that Friday's meeting should have resulted in potential redesigns for the skybridge at this late date is completely unreasonable.

Critics worry that perhaps Reay has already developed ideas that conform to a particular agenda and that the forums are strictly tummy rubs to lull the public into believing they have a voice. Let's dispel this fear by paying close attention, and participating with the city of Davenport and DavenportOne as the process unfolds. After all, the entire Quad Cities has a vested interest in how these Vision Iowa projects turn out. If the concepts presented by Reay last Friday for the center remain the same after all the public input is synthesized, then the ruse will be up.