

Area has shopping, food and nightlife

By **Paul Restuccia**

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Salem isn't just for witches any more.

Shops and restaurants attracted by the town's influx of young professionals and empty-nesters are changing Downtown Salem's retail landscape.

"Salem will be the Cambridge of the North Shore," predicts Lynn Potoff, co-owner of New Civilita, a combination tea shop, art gallery and New Age workshop that she opened last year.

New Civilita is just one of several shops that have premiered recently along Downtown Salem's Derby and Front streets.

Janet Barsanti this spring opened J. Mode, which sells contemporary women's clothing from labels like Nicole Miller, Anna Paul, Isda and Eileen Fisher.

"Things are happening here," Barsanti said. "Downtown Salem has huge potential, and the new residents are making a big difference here."

Nearby, Andy King and his wife last year cut the ribbon on A&J King Artisan Bakers, which quickly attracted a loyal following for its gourmet breads and pastries.

"We've gotten a fantastic response," said King, who's already decided to add sandwich and espresso stations and more tables.

Other newcomers include Seed Stitch Fine Yarn, Beadworks, the Front Street Cafe and an upscale florist called Fiddleheads.

Landlord Bill Goldberg, who owns the 19th century brick buildings that some of the new shops call home, said his company worked hard to attract independently owned stores.

"Downtowns like Salems can compete with the malls if they have niche retail that has character and quality," he said.

Long known as the site of the 1692 Salem Witch Trials, Salem began in the 1990s to capitalize on its growing popularity as a Halloween destination.

A citywide Halloween celebration attracted some 40,000 people a year, so shops opened up to sell everything from witches' clothing to Wiccan spells.

A major expansion of the Peabody Essex Museum also draws visitors in, as does "Artists Row," a street of enclosed stalls that the city provides to craftspeople.

Randie Farmelant said she opened Feed Your Head - which carries counterculture books, magazines and notions - to cater to the city's growing artist population.

"Salem has been on the verge for years, but I think it's finally arrived," Farmelant said.

Rinus Oosthoek of the Salem Chamber of Commerce agrees.

"The whole feel of Salem is changing," he said, noting that the downtown is adding an upscale cosmetics boutique called Rouge, a maternity shop called Chula Mama, wine-and-cheese store and an outpost of trendy Hub pizzeria The Upper Crust. "We're pushing to attract year-round businesses . . . to make this a regional shopping destination."

Salem has long had good restaurants like Cilantro, Lyceum, Strega, Finz, Passage to India and the Sweet Taste of Asia.

There are also longtime local stalwarts like Red's Sandwich Shop, a popular breakfast-and-lunch spot.

But Salem is also trying to add more nightlife.

City officials recently began urging retailers to stay open until 10 p.m. to draw residents in after work.

CinemaSalem, a local movie house that shows a mix of first-run and art films, also



Janet Barsanti's J. Mode clothing boutique offers Downtown Salem shoppers a wide range of contemporary women's fashions. (Staff photo by Patrick Whittemore)

recently reopened after many years of closure.

Additionally, local watering holes like the Edgewater Cafe and Rockafellas offer live music, as does the new Gulu-Gulu Cafe that just opened downtown.

"Downtown Salem is vibrant and cool and already alive," said Gulu-Gulu owner Steve Feldman. "We've come here to join the party."