

News article written for interactive online journalism. Spring 2013.

The old turns to new at The Knitting Mill

Originally a place where clothes were made, the turn-of-the-century brick building on Chattanooga's North Shore now holds isles full of history. Knitting Mill Antiques is the popular spot for collectors and treasure-hunters to find quality vintage collectables.

Constructed in 1916 the two-story factory was owned by the Signal Apparel Company that manufactured various types of clothing for shipment worldwide.

With the general decline of the U.S. textile industry in the 1980's, the large building was too big for production. It was eventually sold to its current owners, a partnership of real estate investors, Scott and Lynn Short.

The old factory's makeover began in 2003. The Shorts did not intend on owning an antique mall but had planned to renovate the building into apartments.

"I didn't even know what an antique mall was when we bought the property," Scott said. "We originally were going to do loft apartments and in fact we had plans drawn. But when our construction budget came back it just wouldn't hold up to the rental structure at the time here in Chattanooga."

After some research for an alternative use, Lynn thought of creating Knitting Mill Antiques. The new store opened its doors in December of that same year, making 2013 their 10-year anniversary.

"Started out we had about 22 dealers and today we have grown to almost a hundred dealers of antiques and collectables," Scott said.

News article written for interactive online journalism. Spring 2013.

Not only has The Knitting Mill expanded, it is on the National Register of Historic places and received the 2005 Excellence Award for Adaptive Re-use by the Regional Planning Agency. The walls and floor are original and even the old belt drives that ran the sewing machines are still in place.

“It has a very long history. The building itself is pushing 100 years old,” Scott said. “Incidentally we have a lot of people that will come through here and just start looking around at the building more than the merchandise, and they’ll say that they worked here for x amount of years. We always enjoy that and happy to give them the run of the place if they like.”

Store manager DeLaney O’Daniel has been working at the Knitting Mill for 8 years and said by far she also enjoys people the most. “For me it’s the people, looking for what they want and finding it. Or looking for what they want but finding something they like,” she said.

Vendors at the Knitting Mill pay a fixed rate every month and also a small rate of sales for employees to help sell merchandise. Scott explained that, “the vendors are welcome to sell whatever they like, as long as it meets a certain mix and criteria, as far as being vintage.”

Scott and his team do not approve items as they come in but dealers understand the guidelines. “We have been known to veto some things.” Scott said.

The Knitting Mill currently does not have room for more vendors, but does have a waiting list dealers can sign up on. “We have very little turn over. Generally speaking people really enjoy being a dealer here. It’s a great hobby, and we try to provide a good pleasant atmosphere where people will feel comfortable coming in.”

News article written for interactive online journalism. Spring 2013.

One vendor at the Knitting Mill has sold her stuff there since they opened. She said that it is a lot of fun being a dealer there and sales just keep getting better and better. "I have been in the same spot, some people move around, but I like my spot right here," She said.

Some dealers bring merchandise in every day to satisfy demand. The isles of collectables attract hundreds of shoppers on the weekends, especially Saturday. Customers range in age and gender, people looking for the same things for different reasons.

Assistant store manager, Ryan Bush said the best part of her job is looking at all the stuff, and interacting with the wide variety of people that come into the store. "We have a good mix of people. On the weekends sometimes you can't get down the isle," she said.

The Knitting Mill provides a pleasant shopping experience for people traveling in and also locals like Jane and her mother. They are regular shoppers and continually find things to take home.

"I bring my mother here whenever she needs a treat, she loves this kind of thing. Its really great, mom loves looking at this kind of stuff, its inside, climate controlled, and the stuff changes all the time. For a few dollars you can have fun," she said.

For hours and location visit knittingmillantiques.com