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Monday, May 21, 2007

## Rochester's Winter Street plaza offers services, retailing off the beaten path

By CONOR MAKEM  
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ROCHESTER — Thousands of motorists speed through South Main Street every day, unaware of the hidden jewel not even a block away. Situated just to the east of the beaten track, directly behind Walgreens, is One Winter Street, a plaza filled with 10 locally owned businesses.

No corporate offices, no board meetings or stockholders. Just locals acting as their own bosses, as employees, each with a huge stake in the plaza's successes and failures.

Karen Pollard, Rochester's Economic Development manager, considers One Winter Street to be part of the downtown business district. She stresses the importance of small businesses to a community and adds that the



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city tries hard to give them a lot of attention.

"I think what comes through from many small business owners is that personal customer service," she says. "Small business owners in Rochester are very friendly, even to each other, and that is particularly Rochester."

Recently, Barbara Ragonese of Art Bits toured her fellow plaza stores, introducing herself to the other owners. She was in her new space at the corner of the building for just over a month, operating alongside Penny Wise Bride. Her even newer neighbors, the women at Elegant Touch Hair Salon, had just held a ribbon cutting and everyone was getting to know each other.

Upstairs, Angela Zampell was busy fashioning women's clothing at Mode Merr. Zampell's main outlet has been the Internet, but thanks to the close-knit community at One Winter Street, she has begun offering her lines of women's clothing to Rochesterites through Penny Wise Bride.

One store in particular has been a city staple for generations — Cullen's Drycleaners. Owner Peggy Simmons has articles and memorabilia on Cullen's dating back to the early 1900s, greeting patrons upon entering. It is one of Rochester's long-standing, family-run businesses. Simmons is one of the majority of women operating businesses in the Winter Street Plaza.

Chip Noon, Rochester's Main Street director, thinks of the plaza as a microcosm of what downtown Rochester is striving to become — a variety of adjacent shops offering convenience and service. He thinks of the small business owner as being able to offer consumers a higher level of service than they'll find in a chain store or in a mall.

From the Shundas at Shunda Signs, who create business packages, vehicle wraps, kids' room decorations and more, to the knowledgeable Tim and Wendy Jandebour, operators of The Pet Store, to Heather Miranda, often out and about with her landscaping service, the shop owners on Winter Street are examples of the small business service Noon cites.

After your shopping is done, Brian Cassidy, manager at Rochester Self Storage, has spaces for rent to store it all. Then head into Burnham Video for an evening's entertainment.



**Conor Makem/Times photo** Some of the personalities you'll meet around One Winter Street gathered recently for a photo. From left are: Brian Cassidy, manager of Rochester Self-Storage; Jennifer Howard, owner of Elegant Touch Hair Salon; Renee LaBrecque, assistant manager at Elegant Touch; Keri DuBay, stylist at Elegant Touch; Tim Jandebour, owner of The Pet Store; Peggy Simmons, owner of Cullen's Drycleaners; Barbara Ragonese, owner of Art Bits; and Angela Zampell, owner of Mode Merr.

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City Planning Director Kenn Ortmann sees One Winter Street as playing a key role in a vital downtown, much in the way that a good meal comes together with all of its various ingredients.

"There's a synergy when people come to one area and have the opportunity to get a variety of their needs met," he says.

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