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Frustration and disappointment surround closure of local yarn and wool shop

Wool & Silk Co. to close after 20 years in Shelburne

Written By **Joushua Drakes**

After two decades under multiple owners, the Wool & Silk Co. will be closing its doors due to financial strain and a failed deal with the location's landlord. Saturday, Mar. 30 will be the last day to shop in the store.

?A lot of people asked me, ?Are you sad because you're closing?' Somewhat, but I felt more angry,? said Diane Griffith, the owner of Wool & Silk Co.

Griffith said she was experiencing a mixture of sadness and anger at the closure. She said that the store is more than a shop; it's a community meeting spot where people can feel welcome. Monthly dinners, knitting groups, and casual chats have made it a beloved spot for many area residents.

?We have knitting groups in the afternoon on Wednesday, and we have dinner once a month,? she said.

?A lot of people just drop in to chat. You know, they feel comfortable here.?

Karen Forguson and Alison Fowles are two shoppers of Wool & Silk Co. who travel there from Cabbagetown in Toronto. They travelled far from home for a unique experience they said only brick-and-mortar shops can provide.

?We want to see and feel these materials,? Forguson said. ?You can't find these specialty items online.

?We turned our browsing into a day trip and came here.?

The pair were disappointed to hear the store was closing.

?It's a real shame,? Fowles said. ?We're going to miss them.?

New customers were still finding the store despite the looming closing date, highlighting its persistent community presence.

?It's really a shame because it has been a bit of an institution for 20 years and still in the last few weeks people come in and say ?oh, I just found you,'? said Griffith.

Although the brick-and-mortar location will close, Griffith already has an online store to which she has since transitioned.

?I actually created an online presence five years ago, which was fortunate for me, because I already had that in place when COVID happened,? she said.

However, Griffith said that it can't replace a physical store.

?It's a very tactile type of hobby and craft,? she said. ?People want to physically see the colour, and they want to touch it. It's very hard to replicate that online.?

Griffith also said that she will now have to face competition from already established online businesses.

?I'm selling a lot online right now, but I'm doing a price reduction,? she said. ?There's Amazon, and even in the yarn industry, there

are large online presences like this one called Nitpicks, and they've been there for a while, too, so they hurt you a little bit.?

Griffith, who took over the business nine years ago from the previous owner, said that since the COVID pandemic, it's become too expensive for some small businesses to survive.

?There was a moratorium on rent increases during COVID for two years,? she said. ?And when that came off, literally the next day, I had a new lease in my inbox and my rate went up by 30 per cent.?

Griffith said that things were different when she first came to rent the building.

?When I first went there, there was an older guy owning the building, and it was a very reasonable rent,? she said.

With a new landlord from out of town charging higher rates, the financial burden became too great. Despite Griffith attempting to negotiate a better deal, the landlord held firm.

She said that her rent is now double what it was when she began.

Griffith said that she would like to see more help from the township to protect smaller businesses, which make up the heart and soul of communities, before more are forced to close their doors.

?I spoke with the town, and there wasn't a whole lot they could do,? Griffith said. ?Although I think that if they put in a bylaw, something that says if your building sits vacant for six months, and you don't have a contract that's going to happen within the next two or three months, they get a fee added onto their taxes, something as an incentive,?

?Small businesses are the businesses that support the hockey teams and do stuff for the local fair and all those things. Everybody wants that stuff,? she added.

The final day for in-store shopping will be Mar. 30, at which point the business will switch to a purely online model.

Check out their online offering at www.woolandsilkcoshop.com.