

## Downtown reborn with unique retailers

by Jim Veihdeffer

Historic downtown Chandler is in the midst of what could well be described as a modern Renaissance, with six unique businesses about to, or already, open.

The newly unveiled Uptown Bridal & Boutique is the first of three businesses to open at 11 W. Boston St., the 1918 building that was originally Reliable Hardware and later became the Arrow Pharmacy. Uptown Bridal offers exclusive bridal collections and designers, bridal party fashions and accessories. Co-owner Tonia Tinker promises a decidedly

uptown experience of prenuptial pampering – along with fashionable flirty prom wear in Suite 3.

Opening next month in Suite 1 is a contemporary art gallery featuring juried artwork from local, regional, national and international artists. Art on Boston, under the leadership of co-directors Wendy Fallon and Laurie Fagen, will also offer art classes and glassed artist studio space so interested passers-by can watch artists at work. An artists' cooperative exhibit space is also available for fine art and fine craft, including wall art, wearable art, jewelry, pottery and ceramics.

With a promise of "urban tease" as opposed to "high teas," the Urban Tea Loft opens this May in Suite 2. The upscale retail tea shop will offer a full range of teas from around the world. Mixing old with new, the tea room's 16-foot tin ceilings are reminiscent of the building's

original history while high-definition, flat-screen televisions and high-backed leather chairs in a separate meeting room, offering a hideaway for meetings and more intimate gatherings.

Helping to celebrate the gamut of life's special occasions is Inspirador, an upscale 12,000 -square-foot venue for weddings, receptions, corporate functions and private parties. The new downtown addition, set to open later this spring or early summer, features an outdoor courtyard with

a fireplace, reception room, private retreats for brides and grooms and a kitchen for caterers. Inspirador's owner, Dilia Wood, is busy renovating the 1916 O.S. Stapley Hardware store with a Spanish Colonial façade and elegant interior at 63 E. Boston St.

It wouldn't be much of a renaissance without a brewery, a shortcoming soon to be satisfied by The San Tan Brewing Company, which will locate at 8 S. San Marcos Pl. and is scheduled to open in June. Owner Anthony Canecchia will offer a pub-style, conversation-oriented atmosphere with contemporary ales and lagers hand-crafted onsite.

"Sexy, dark, cool and loud" are the watchwords for Vivi's Boutique as Columbian-born Viviana Kedzior brings an eye for upscale, vibrant women's clothing

and accessories to 95 W. Boston St. The store is slated for its first browsers in late summer or early fall.

### Rebirth took forward thinking

"There's plenty of credit to go around for this renaissance of eclectic venues," says Martha Place, executive director of the Downtown Chandler Community Partnership (DCCP), a nonprofit organization that works closely with the city to draw both businesses and residential projects to what it calls "the enhanced municipal district."

Place, a new Chandler resident who has only been with DCCP for about six months, cites Chandler's mayor and city council as well as private developers such as Desert Viking and Ross Robb Developers for the forward thinking that resulted in the upsurge in downtown economic development.

The district is bordered on the north by Chandler Boulevard, the south by Frye Road, the east

by Delaware Street and the west through a zigzag of Dakota, California and Oregon streets.

"It was not a pleasant place," says Place when describing the lack of downtown tenants in years past. "But now most, if not all, of our storefronts are full."

She gives special kudos to Dennis and Melissa Minchella, owners of the Bistro@Kokopelli Winery, for leading the way.



UPTOWN BRIDAL: Tonia Tinker, Dianne Everson, Nicole Gould



ART ON BOSTON: Wendy Fallon, left, and Laurie Fagen



URBAN TEA LOFT: Glynnis Legrand



BREWING: San Tan Brewing Company is under construction in downtown Chandler.

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Chandler Mayor Boyd Dunn, now in his second term, says the city learned lessons from seeing how other cities including Tempe, Phoenix and Scottsdale, have developed their downtowns.

"It's so important to preserve the historical character of our downtown," Dunn says. "People want to have a sense of their roots."

Dunn points out that Chandler is one of the oldest cities in the Valley, with the first golf course in Arizona.

"We were the original Palm Springs and we're on schedule to become the next unique downtown destination in the East Valley."

## Preservation key to success

One controlling issue for city planners is what Dunn calls "residential build out."

There are six to seven more years for residential development in Chandler, according to Dunn, and this is a point where many cities have failed.

"Once the residences are done, there is going to be tremendous pressure on elected officials to build homes where homes do not belong. They'll need to

preserve those areas that are designed for jobs and retail so that we can avoid becoming a bedroom community. We're almost a standalone community now when it comes to jobs – which means as many people come here to work as leave – but not quite there. I can give you example after example of cities where leaders gave away their employment corridors to residential development."

That said, both DCCP's Place and Dunn agree on the need for a lively mix of retail and residential use downtown.

"Residential development is so important to the revitalization of any downtown environment," Place says. "People want to live close to where they work, shop, dine and play."

Dunn strongly believes the city is on track in its three-part plan for downtown: bring in businesses; bring in new residences; give the downtown a unique retail atmosphere that stays true to its historical character.

"That's why we have an overlay, a visual plan of where things should go and the kinds of businesses we would like to see. We have a definite plan for

downtown. We don't want drugstores or fast food. But we have to have patience. People forget that Tempe's downtown hasn't always been there. When I was in college, it was no place you'd want to go after dark. But, the people with a vision stuck to their plan and now they have downtown Tempe."

"We're a work in process," adds Place. "It's kind of a contradiction. Here we are, a city nearing a quarter million people yet we still have this quaint and charming downtown with all these new, neat stores. I'd definitely call it the Chandler Renaissance."

## Get more info

Here is contact information for organizations and companies mentioned in this article: DCCP: [www.downtownchandler.org](http://www.downtownchandler.org); Uptown Bridal & Boutique: [www.uptownbrides.com](http://www.uptownbrides.com); Art on Boston: [www.ArtOnBoston.com](http://www.ArtOnBoston.com); Urban Tea Loft: call 480-786-9600; Inspirador: [www.inspirador.com](http://www.inspirador.com); San Tan Brewing Company: call 480-330-2979.

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