

Small Business Saturday: Area shops beat odds as they battle giants



The News-Press – Jennifer Williams has owned her Fort Myers boutique for a long time: 35 years, to be exact. **Jennifer's Boutique** has done business in the same location on McGregor Boulevard in Cypress Square all that time. About half of all businesses don't make it past five years and only one-third make it 10 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, highlighting how hard it can be to achieve success and stability. That's one reason American Express started **Small Business Saturday** in 2010. It's a way to recognize small business owners in communities across the nation, including Southwest Florida.

Highlighting Small Business Saturday helped local businesses generate \$15.4 billion the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 2016.

Williams thought back to when she started her boutique at the age of 23.

"I was pretty directed and pretty focused," she said. "I put my head down and kept going. I can't even wrap my head around it's been 35 years."

Now a change is in order. Williams is moving the store just north, to the Design Center, by year's end. The center includes The Melting Pot, First Watch, Spada, Sweet Bean Coffee Café and other retailers. The new store is about the same size as the existing location, but has 20-foot ceilings.

"I love the store, but I felt I needed to be in a shopping center that had partners

more suited to what I do,” she said. “Everyone likes excitement and change and energy. It’s nice to offer people something different. It’s really close.”



Sally Hanson and husband, Roger Osborn (left) with President/CEO Michael Plummer Jr.

Sally Hanson is a new arrival to Fort Myers, recently starting Our Town of Southwest Florida. She also owns the Our Town at the Triangle franchise in Raleigh, N.C. Both are part of **Our Town America**.

“We welcome new people that are moving into the area,” she said, adding that moving is a major stressor. “They don’t know the area. We make their transition easier for them and introduce them to local businesses.”

Hanson and her Fort Myers Small Biz Support Squad will be visiting small business owners in Lee County on Small Business Saturday, handing out goodies.

“This is just growing and growing and growing because small businesses are the backbone of our community and we just want to thank them for all the hard work that they do,” she said.

While most people are enjoying time around the holidays with family and friends, many small business owners are putting in their longest hours of the year.

“We’re going around with balloons and gift cards from local businesses to thank them for their service,” she said. “It’s going to be a surprise. I have some businesses in mind, but it’s kind of random. I know how hard these people work. Through good times and bad, they keep chugging along.”

Speaking of “chugging along,” Williams thought back to challenges along her

journey, including the rise of online shopping. One silver lining: it has helped that her clientele skews a little older.

“They still want that experience of touching the merchandise, feeling the merchandise, having someone assist them, getting feedback,” she said. “The store is kind of like ‘Cheers.’ There have been a lot of friendships made. You’re not going to get any kind of camaraderie at 2:30 in the morning on Amazon searching for a pair of jeans.”

Jennifer’s Boutique has a big event each November for the anniversary. This time of year, the focus is on holiday wear and small items that make nice gifts. On Small Business Saturday, customers will receive a gift with purchases and get an additional 25 percent off sale merchandise.

“We definitely cater to our clients for the holidays,” she said.

Naples businesses

For Footed Friends, an all-natural pet food store in Naples, has participated in Small Business Saturday for about a decade, using the marketing materials and swag that come along with it, but not offering any special discounts geared just for the day.

“We’re hoping that Small Business Saturday is as popular as it has been in the past,” said owner Rose Scarisbrick. “It has been busy in the past.”

With predictions of more online shopping this holiday season, she’s not sure how that will affect her business.

Though customers can’t buy products on her company’s website, she offers free delivery in Collier County, so customers can arrange orders and get products without making a trip to the store at no extra cost.

Retail spaces revamp as digital disrupts

At Ooh La La Jewels Du Jour in Naples there are always specials to be had on Small Business Saturday.

This year deals will include 20 percent off sterling silver jewelry and savings of 20 to 50 percent throughout the store on a variety of merchandise.

Offers will include buy three-get one free on ginger snaps. There will be sales on readers (three for \$15) and sunglasses (three for \$12).

Black Friday sales, however, will be even better, and will include a \$100 gift bag with a \$75 purchase, said Tammy Kipp, one of the store's owners.

She hopes to see customers come in both days to take advantage of the different offers.

"It's nice that people think about the mom and pops instead of the big boxes all the time. We are locally grown here," Kipp said. "We've been here for 46 years and it's nice that the locals support the locals."

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Fort Myers-area businesses looking to team up with Our Town of Southwest Florida can contact Sally Hanson at 919-349-7611 or [sign up online now](#) using our New Movers on Demand platform.

Small businesses in any U.S. market can reach out to Our Town America's corporate team to get in touch with their local representative. Call by phone at 800-497-8360.