

BUSINESS NEWS

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Christmas Cottage celebrates a merry 30 years of holidays

*By Laura Stanfill
The News Guard*

It's more than merchandise that keeps customers coming back, according to Barbe Jenkins-Gibson.

She's the owner of the Christmas Cottage, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

"It has to be something more than just merchandise to make it this long, because merchandise can be acquired many places," Jenkins-Gibson said.

She credits her focus on customer service as the key to the business' success.

Jenkins-Gibson started her business 30 years ago in Portland as the Enchanted Dollhouse.

"I was tired of my job," she said. "I didn't want to be a secretary forever, but I didn't know anything about business."

She decided that in order to succeed, she would have to come up with a novel idea to pursue, rather than trying to compete with pre-existing businesses.

"That way I had a chance to learn the business as I went along, and it's worked well," she said.

Jenkins-Gibson said the Christmas theme that has evolved doesn't have anything to do with her childhood memories of the holiday season.

"I always liked Christmas, but it wasn't because of that that I started this," she said. "I enjoy the variety because that attracts a variety of customers, and that's what keeps the business interesting."

Items galore

Jenkins-Gibson features two lines of custom ornaments that she designs. The 16th annual gold ornament features the state, rather than just the coast, to commemorate the new shop she has opened.

The other line is a lighthouse series with paintings done by Arlon Gilliland, owner of the Bird's Nest Gallery.

"He does a painting of an Oregon coast lighthouse for me, and I write historic information about the lighthouse and have it all put onto a glass ball from Germany," Jenkins-Gibson said.

She said there are two or three left in the series. This year's features the Yaquina Bay Lighthouse.

The store carries numerous ornaments on various themes, including animals, fishing, Native American, farming, fairy tales, musical instruments and more. Specialties include German nutcrackers, Christmas cards, the Pipka line of Santas, European glass ornaments and nativity scenes.

“We even have a chicken nativity,” Jenkins-Gibson said. “It’s called a ‘chickentivity.’”

Despite its name, the Christmas Cottage offers non-holiday items, such as collectible figures and greeting cards. Offerings include the Wee Forest Folk figurines, made out of dental clay, from Massachusetts; various Raggedy Ann and Andy items; salt and pepper shakers with various themes; nesting Russian Matroeshka dolls and easy listening music.

The Christmas Cottage offers free gift wrapping with any purchase. Personalizing is also available.

“We write anything on their ornaments that they want,” Jenkins-Gibson said. “I’ve done several marriage proposals.”

Staff is year-round

Unlike many holiday themed shops, the Christmas Cottage is open year-round, and Jenkins-Gibson keeps her staff year-round to suit customers’ needs. In the slower, winter season, staff members make handmade shell ornaments to sell.

“Those who visit the Christmas Cottage can meet Nellie the dog, named for Nelscott.

One of Jenkins-Gibson’s big challenges was a fire in 1994, caused by a burglar who broke in and started a fire, she said. It happened in April, the week after Easter.

“The business was a total loss,” she said.

She started ordering new items immediately, and about 90 days later, the store was up and running again.

“It was really hard for the whole town,” she said. “It was extremely hard for all the children in the town, because they were afraid Santa had burned up and there’d be no Christmas.”

Jenkins-Gibson and others visited local schools to provide assurance that the holiday would continue.

Jenkins-Gibson said she enjoys being in a community that attracts tourists.

“We have the opportunity to meet such a wide array of wonderful people, and we aren’t in a social vacuum,” she said.

Inside the Cottage

The Christmas Cottage, 3305 SW Hwy 101, Lincoln City, is open from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily except for Christmas and Thanksgiving. For more information call (541) 996-2230.

The store has a long history. Here are some highlights:

- May 1974 - Berbe Jenkins-Gibson opened the Enchanted Dollhouse at Swan Island in Portland.
- January 1975 - The Enchanted Dollhouse was relocated to the Nelscott strip in Lincoln City, where Penny Pinchers’ Antiques had been.
- October 1978 - Jenkins-Gibson purchased the building next door and divided the business into two stores, adding the Christmas Cottage name.
- 1984 - She sold the Enchanted Dollhouse and it was moved to Canada. She sold the building to Nelscott Leatherworks.
- April 2, 1994 - A burglar broke into the Christmas Cottage and set it on fire. The building was saved, but the store was a total loss, and the building had to be gutted, Jenkins-Gibson said.
- July 1, 1994 - The store reopened after the fire.
- 1995 - Nelscott Leatherworks’ owner retired, and Jenkins-Gibson repurchased the building for future expansion.
- May 1999 - The expansion opened, doubling the size of the store.