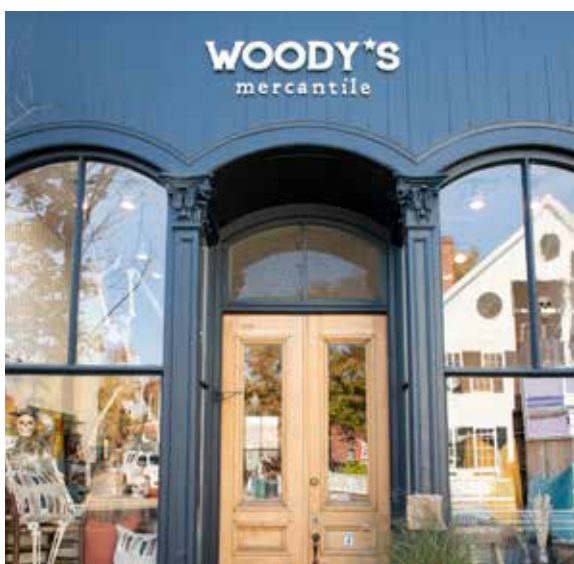


# A Store for Our Times

Woody's Mercantile can help you expertly feather your nest

By Stephen D'Agostino | Photos by Lynn Bohannon

**O**n the day Suzi Curtis opened Woody's Mercantile in Woodstock, she turned to her two daughters who were with her for the big day and said, "There isn't one thing in this store that people need." That may not sound like the best mindset for a new shop owner, but it is understandable. Woody's Mercantile opened July 1, 2020. Fifteen days earlier, Vermont's governor had extended the state of emergency declaration regarding COVID-19. Travel to Vermont was restricted, as were the number of people allowed in a retail establishment at one time. Clearly, it was not the best time to start a brand-new career in retail or open a store in a tourist town.



Above: Proprietor Suzi Curtis in her element.

Opposite: Woody's maintains Woodstock's historic feel with a fresh take.











Top: Holiday decor is in stock and always rotating.  
Above: A relaxed atmosphere blends with personalized service.

Or maybe, in some strange way, it was. “Since the opening,” Suzi says, “people have danced and squealed, saying how much fun it is to be in a store again.” As Suzi relates this story to me, she sits on a couch framed by a rack of pillows in intricately designed cases on one side and a table full of small, artfully arranged

home accents on the other. I sit on a chair opposite her. In between us, a table with books atop it provides a barrier that approximates six feet.

Suzi starts the conversation by explaining the name of the store. One might guess it’s a play on the name of the town. It is not, though it is a happy coincidence. “The name comes from my dear friend, Woody Weider,” Suzi says. Suzi and Woody met 25 years ago through work. Both were sales representatives for sports apparel. “Woody was one of those people that everyone knew and everyone loved,” Suzi says. “He

embodied the Vermont lifestyle. He did maple sugaring. Always in the outdoors. He was an incredible athlete.”

Woody died three years ago. With the memory of her cherished friend in mind, Suzi dreamed up her foray into retail. “It was going to be a very different type of store than this,” Suzi says. “It would have honored the person Woody was.” Suzi envisioned the store as a sporting goods shop. She also had planned for the store to be in Hanover, New Hampshire, her hometown, noting, “I always wanted to have a little house in a village and walk to my little store.”





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#### A CHANGE OF PLANS

Through 2019, things were progressing in that direction. The Dartmouth Bookstore had closed after more than 140 years in business. Suzi signed a lease on part of the vacated space with the expectations that she would move in by June of 2019. However, June came,

and the space still wasn't ready. Suzi realized she would likely miss the fall season and possibly the holiday season. She let go of her dream of having a store in the town where she lived. But not the dream of a store.

In January, she noticed that the space housing Whippletree Yarn Shop

Seasonal items and gift ideas are in abundance.

was for rent. Suzi jumped at the opportunity. She signed the lease and got busy. “I had hired someone to do the work,” Suzi says, noting that much needed to be done to turn a yarn shop into a mercantile. “Then, COVID hit, and all the work had to stop.” As soon as restrictions began to ease in May, Suzi got her crew into the space, and remodeling commenced. They installed new beadboard, reinforced the walls,





A blend of cozy comfort and creative decorating items is always on display.

and removed cubbies, which were better suited to yarn than the products Woody's would carry.

Though she was going in a different direction than her area of expertise, she was not unprepared for Woody's to be the store it is now. When Suzi was a sales rep for sporting apparel, she would scout out gift shops to see what they were carrying. She kept a spreadsheet of

She stocked the shelves with an eye to products that people might not find—or even search for—on the Internet.

what she liked, telling herself, “If I ever owned a store like this, these would be the brands I want.”

#### WOODY'S MERCANTILE OPENS

Woody's Mercantile morphed into a modern lifestyle store. She stocked the shelves with an eye to products that

people might not find—or even search for—on the Internet, ironically, a staple of our modern lifestyle. “Customers love to browse, shop with friends, and enjoy the experience of seeing selected items put together,” Suzi says. “This can't be done on the Internet.”

It wasn't long before her core custom-





ers revealed themselves. “It’s the locals or the second homeowner who comes up to Woodstock frequently,” she says. “They come in to freshen up or get new pillows or candles,” an especially pertinent mission as it became apparent that our homes were going to take an even more central role in our lives. Not surprisingly, things that scream “Vermont” are in short supply at Woody’s Mercantile. That’s not to say Vermont or this region of the state are not represented. The products in the store echo a Woodstock sense of comfort and style. Woody’s Mercantile offers shoppers

the chance to take that aesthetic home, wherever home is. In some ways, a purchase at Woody’s is a souvenir.

One thing about her displays and product choices that Suzi is proud of is that men enjoy browsing alongside their spouses or partners. “It is rewarding to see men walk around. It looks like they are enjoying themselves also.”

#### BROWSING THE STORE

Though Woody’s Mercantile does not represent many of its namesake’s passions, it does represent one. Woody loved candy. The sweets in the shop are

Top: Woody’s children’s department catches the eye of kids and grown-ups alike.

Above: Books are also a staple.

not just any candy, though. They are things you likely won’t find elsewhere. It’s not artisan; it’s not fussy. But it’s sweet, and it’s fun. The candy selection changes with the season, as does the whole store. Even while customers are browsing, Suzi might be rearranging things.









Woody's even offer's a highly curated clothing assortment.

register—an upscale Elf on the Shelf, if you will.

With the approach of the holidays, Suzi is hopeful. If a second wave of the pandemic does not materialize, she feels that Woodstock could have the best season yet. Woody's Mercantile will be full of gifts. Suzi is working with local craftspeople to make items that tastefully nod to the town. She notes that a local woodworker is making cutting boards with the likeness of the Middle Covered Bridge adorning them.

If the pandemic restrictions return and force people back into quarantine, hopefully they had a chance to visit Woody's Mercantile to freshen up their home, give it a bit more comfort, make it a little sweeter. As for Suzi, if the pandemic disrupts holiday shopping, she jokes that she'll be eating ornaments into 2021. 🍷

#### Woody's Mercantile

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