

Grey: Old Town to become 'big tourism draw'

Much improvement made since 1990s

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MANKATO — Denny Yetter, owner of Denco Lighting, remembers the initial push to reinvigorate Old Town Mankato began in the early 1990s. And since then, especially recently, much improvement has been made.

Peggy Grey, owner of Mary Lue's Yarn and Ewe, moved her business to a storefront in Old Town from St. Peter several years ago for a variety of reasons.

"We knew about the progress that was being made in Envision 2020," Grey said. "Also, Old Town has the ambiance we wanted for our store."

The Envision 2020 progress refers in part to giving the district a facelift — enhancing its beauty and bringing foot traffic back to the area.

Yetter said improvements have been made, including flower baskets, construction to straighten Riverfront Drive and additional parking. Also, Riverfront Park opened last summer, which brought concerts to Old Town and more pedestrians, Grey said.

As Grey looks toward the future, she sees the addition of retail in the area to be the biggest help in making Old Town more attractive to tourists and shoppers.

"The more retail the better," she said.

Also, eateries are more concentrated in the South Front Street area, but bringing restaurants to North Riverfront would direct a lot more business to the area, she said. Erin and Tammey Gatchell's ice cream shop is scheduled to open this summer at Rock Street and Riverfront, Grey said, which will help.

Grey — who is involved in marketing with the City Center Partnership and with an Old Town retailers group — is optimistic about the future of the area.

"Within the next two years, we're going to develop into a big tourism draw," she said.

The key, she said, will be marketing. For starters, she hopes the businesses will lose the Old Town moniker and start being referred to as Shops on Riverfront. Old Town might make people think the area is out of touch, maybe trapped in the past, she said.

As a cooperative between the district's retailers and City Center Partnership, various ideas are being discussed. One that is already in place are the banners that were ordered to hang along the street and help shape the identity of the area.

And one more thing she's looking forward to is the year-round CityArt Walking Sculpture Tour, which will feature 25 sculptures throughout downtown Mankato along Hickory and Second streets, and along Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato. The event kicks off May 21.

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PEGGY GREY
Owner Mary Lue's
Yarn and Ewe



File photo



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Pat Christman

Peggy Grey is the owner of Mary Lue's Yarn and Ewe in Old Town.

The Old Town district of Mankato has undergone changes recently to help draw more attention to the area.