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A real Find: New boutique opening downtown in Ash Skyline Plaza

By Beth Behrendt, for The News-Sentinel
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"I would jump at the opportunity to sell clothes! I would love that!" remarked one woman to another, engaging in cocktail chatter at a party thrown by the company where both their husbands work.

Little did Roya Kelly know that Libby Ash took special note of that comment and wouldn't soon forget it.

Ash and her friend Melani Wilson had recently been discussing some kind of business partnership. Wilson and Ash are friends who share a passion for making jewelry. Their chats about jewelry workshops evolved into discussing shared studio space, maybe adding a retail aspect. Wilson, a self-described "lawyer turned serial entrepreneur," is co-owner of The Trove, a gifts, clothing and home décor boutique in Roanoke. Wilson initially suggested they look for a space in Roanoke to set up their studio.

Wilson recalled, "Then one day Libby came into The Trove – I still remember her leaning way over the counter, whispering dramatically, 'What do you think about a space downtown?' And I said, 'Is it where I think it is?'"

Ash's husband, Tim, CEO of Ash Brokerage, was in the midst of the construction of Ash Skyline Plaza, which many were touting as the most exciting project to hit downtown Fort Wayne since Parkview Field. The plaza has a grand opening today.

"Tim mentioned that he had 900 square feet still available," said Ash. "As much as I wanted retail space, I didn't want to do it on my own. I kept thinking 'I would love it to be like The Trove.' So I went to talk to Melani!"

Wilson had learned from her experience at The Trove, that collaboration is her preferred way of working. "As sole owner, you get all of the hassle and none of the fun. Sharing it with friends is so much better."

As the two women discussed possibilities, Ash remembered Kelly's comment about her passion for selling clothes. "I knew Roya is a fantastic salesperson and had won lots of awards as a pharmaceutical sales rep. She has a great style sense of style, too! But, I also knew that she had just started a new job and was really enjoying it."

Kelly concurred, "I stayed home with my kids when they were little, but had recently decided to get back in the workplace. I love medicine and sales and decided to return to 'big pharma.' I found a job right away, faster than I thought I would, and was telling everyone how happy I was to be back into it."

"I was reluctant to even ask her about the store idea. I knew she was doing well at her new job and really liked it. But at the office Christmas party, after a cocktail ...," laughed Ash, "I decided I had to at least ask her!"

"It was such a compliment to be asked," said Kelly. "Melani and Libby are both so creative. I was beyond flattered they would want to include me."

Even though Ash and Kelly excitedly talked over the idea through the rest of the party, Kelly didn't say "yes" right away. "I had to talk it over with my husband. I'd been out of the workforce for 6 years. How could I go from that to juggling two jobs? But Brendon was totally supportive and excited for me."



By Beth Behrendt for The News-Sentinel/Melani Wilson, Roya Kelly and Libby Ash have opened the Find in Ash Skyline Plaza.

More Information

New in town

WHAT: The Find's grand opening

WHEN: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. today.

Melani Wilson Designs and Libby Ash Designs Trunk Shows 3-6 p.m. (with light hors d'oeuvres and beverages)

The Find

WHERE: 210 W. Wayne St.

HOURS: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays

WEBSITE: thefindfw.com

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Wilson had the same sentiment. "All of our husbands have been super supportive. They've done anything they could – polishing floors, hauling boxes – to make it happen."

Wilson and Ash, both mothers of three, and Kelly, with two children, feel strongly about the examples they pass on to their children. "I was a stay-at-home mom and lived and breathed my children and their school -- and loved every minute of it!" said Ash. "But after studying jewelry making and metal-smithing, I fell in love with that, too. I've made a commitment to follow my dream."

"I love bringing my daughter to see the progress of the store. It's a great lesson to see her mother as an entrepreneur," said Kelly. "And just as important for our sons to see!" chimed in Wilson.

Kelly remarked, "The older you get, the fewer really new things come into your life -- new things to learn or do. I'm feeling like back in college, when the whole world is out there and options seem endless. But my sense of gratitude is so much greater now. To those who bring opportunities, like Libby and Melani, and to my husband and family who make it possible to pursue those opportunities."

Ash continued, "We are so excited to be part of downtown and add one more element to what's bringing people here. There is so much excitement and activity!"

"Downtown is becoming more than just a place people work," Wilson said. "It's vibrant! I see people from my law firm days, but now we run into each other at the food trucks, or walking to a coffee shop, or stopping by the shop."

All three are excited to share their enthusiasm and passions through The Find. Kelly, who's responsible for selecting the clothing that the store will carry, explained, "When you feel good in what you're wearing, it can be such a game changer and can affect your whole day. I want to give that gift to other women."

Ash is delighted at how much local and regional talent she's encountering. "I want to highlight as many local artists as possible. There are so many great Midwestern designers, but I'm amazed at how much talent there is right here in Fort Wayne."

Wilson said, "I have always loved supporting what I call 'makers.' I want to share their creations – especially if they have great stories."

Kelly, Ash, and Wilson are living out their own great stories as they work to enhance downtown Fort Wayne, support local artists, and bring beauty to daily life.

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