

3 New Businesses for Downtown

Three entrepreneurs have given new life to a once blighted neighborhood in Downtown L.A. The area, adjacent to Skid Row, is coming to life because of entrepreneurs are taking a chance there. The Community Development Department's Los Angeles Business Assistance Program (LABAP) has helped them open their doors, and recently they were hailed at a door-to-door progressive grand opening.

At Metropolis Books, at 450 S. Main Street, the opening celebration brought eager customers from as far away as Ontario and Santa Monica. According to owners Julie Swayze and Steve Bowie, the "long distance customers" were enthusiastic about supporting an independent bookstore, which helps to create a destination spot for downtown.

The three businesses join more than 20 others to open with the assistance of the Historic Downtown LA Retail Project, which was created by the Community Development Department's (CDD) L.A. Business Assistance Program (LABAP) and is administered by CDD's partner agency, Valley Economic Development Center (VEDC). The downtown program focuses on bringing new business to the area and it assists existing businesses that want to expand.

The bookstore owners had considered moving to the San Gabriel Valley, but were persuaded to choose downtown because of the help they received with lease negotiations and marketing from LABAP.

Two doors down is Stella Dottir, a women's apparel showroom. Stella Dottir is the name of the person AND store. A fashion designer from Reykjavik, Iceland, this is her first retail store in L.A. Primarily a dress shop, Dottir makes Vintage and Gothic creations that have appeared in numerous movies, music videos, and theatre / television productions. The L.A. Business Assistance Program helped her package a \$15,000 SBA Community Express loan.

Down the street and around the corner is a creative combination of art and food at 5th and Spring; The Red Dot Gallery & Bistro is a fine art gallery & wine bar that connects to Weeneez, a hot dog eatery, serving gourmet dogs with mouth-watering toppings. Both are owned and operated by Julie Rico and her business partner, Sid Carter. Julie's been a mainstay in the L.A. Art scene, but this is her first downtown space. Before opening, Julie attended LABAP sponsored training workshops for retailers including, customer service, financial management, and bookkeeping.

Passion, dedication and perseverance define these entrepreneurs who have been guided by CDD. Now what they want is customers to enjoy their goods and services.

