



L-R: Natasha Lux (owner) Magnolia Flowers Gananoque (pictured) in store ready for Christmas. Derek Ouellete (Owner) Ridgway Confections- Derek is the "Willy Wonka of Seeley's Bay".

# HOLIDAY RETAIL HIDDEN GEMS IN SMALL TOWNS

By Tanya Hammond

This holiday season, I urge you to seek out the hidden gems in your community when looking for that perfect gift. It is those small businesses that are owned by our neighbours and employ our friends that will take the time to listen and get to know us and greet us by name.

I recently had the pleasure of finding such a place in Gananoque. **Magnolia Flowers**, located at **192 King Street East** is, as their tagline says, "a hidden treasure in the 1000 Islands". Much more than flowers, the name simply does not do it justice. The eclectic mix of vintage-inspired furnishings and one-of-a-kind creations is reminiscent of what you might find on the trendy streets of Old Montreal.

Seven years ago, owner Natasha Lux, followed her dream of owning a flower studio after a fourteen-year career in finance. Wanting a place to raise her young family after living in the big city, she fell in love with the popular tourist town of Gananoque. Natasha was quick to point out, "that you must love where you live and work where you love." There is no doubt that she is right where she belongs in a charming shop that captivates you with every step.

You will find handcrafted treasures, including antique chic jewellery, recycled purses and hand stitched nightgowns from local artisans, along with a classic glassware collection from

La Rochere, the oldest glassmaker in France. Pursuing her desire to create, Natasha has added a new line of Chalk Paint™ from Annie Sloan, and in true artistic spirit, organizes workshops to teach those interested.

Natasha and her helpful team, Marilyn and Joan, who she lovingly refers to as a family, take pride in their floral designs and cherished furniture transformations.

It is that same pride in craftsmanship that draws me to another locally owned business. This time, on the main street of Seeleys Bay, **Ridgway Confections**.

A large stately brick home situated at **159 Main Street**, houses the small chocolate shop that is big on flavour. Derek Ouellet and his wife, Cindy Healey settled in the quaint village of Seeley's Bay and quickly became strong supporters of the close-knit community. Their humble beginnings started by crafting sweet treats for family members and then developed into making fudge for a nearby gift shop using the gift shops kitchen. Soon it spiraled into creating chocolate for many area businesses in their very own commercial kitchen. Though wholesale is their main business, fortunately for us, Derek and Cindy open their showroom at certain times of the year. Be sure to check them out this holiday season.

Both certified Chocolatiers, Derek and Cindy, make fine handcrafted Belgian chocolates

with the freshest of ingredients, like real cream and butter, making sure to use only 100% sustainably grown cocoa beans. A perfect gift for that someone special, you will find brittles, bark, bars and boxed chocolates, including razzleberry bites, Irish cream, care a lot caramel, cherry buds, peanut butter bombs and more. Yes, they are as delectable as they sound! You can also order platters for your family or business get together. Imagine the impression you will make when you serve these melt in your mouth morsels.

At Ridgway Confections, they care about their customers, and they are always willing to create custom orders. That caring attitude extends to their community as they host what is known as "Ridgway Confections Truffle Shuffle" a 5 km run/walk through Seeleys Bay raising money for the local food bank.

There are many retail gems in our various towns and communities in our area. Take the time this holiday season and seek them out. You will unearth many great gift treasurers that will sure to delight that special someone this Christmas! **LH**

For More information and store hours check out [www.magnoliaflowers.ca](http://www.magnoliaflowers.ca) or call 613-382-8181 and [www.ridgwayconfections.com](http://www.ridgwayconfections.com) or call 613-532-4468.