

Oakridge's Fashions marks 25th anniversary with move to community's heart



Aurora's popular Oakridge's Fashions is making a bold move: to the heart of the community it has served for 25 years.

On New Year's Eve, the boutique secured the lease on an expansive new space in Aurora's downtown core: the former CIBC building just steps from Yonge and Wellington.

With a larger footprint and dedicated parking at the building's rear entrance, it is an exciting new chapter for owner Deb Clark and her team.

"It feels right. It feels like this is where we belong," says Ms. Clark on moving her business from the Aurora Shopping Centre at Yonge Street and Murray Drive to Aurora's historic centre. "Because the business itself is so deeply-embedded into the community, I feel good having my site of business also in the heart of the community. They fit together and it makes me feel both fortunate and a little bit proud to be able to step forward early to support the historic downtown revitalization. We really have a lot of belief in it and we want to see this revitalization succeed" and one of the things we can do is be there!?"

Ms. Clark says she is excited about all the possibilities in store for the area in the future, including new downtown parking to service both Aurora Town Square (formerly Library Square) and area businesses close on the horizon, the foot traffic Town Square will bring in, and the location's proximity to the seasonal Aurora Farmers' Market, and the incoming new Aurora United Church and its associated retirement community.

When they open their new doors in early spring, they will be able to roll out their lines of clothing and accessories in a space that is one-third larger than their current store, giving customers "a really beautiful experience."

It also boasts a basement area to support the retail space above and an on-site kitchen which will help renew Oakridge's dream of becoming a community hub for local fundraising, momentum for which was building just before the arrival of COVID-19.

"The new space means we will be able to conduct our business with more ease and more depth," says Ms. Clark. "A classic question we hear all the time now is, "Do you have another one of these in another size?" and often we have to order it in because we do not have the space to hold extra inventory off the floor.

"Checking off boxes to make sure this is the right decision, the first on my list were the customers' boxes: Would they be comfortable? Will they be able to park? Will they feel at home? Can I transform this space into something that is both new and the

same in a way that will make customers walk in and feel comfortable? I am sensitive to the fact that change is sometimes difficult and I understand that very well, but it is also an essential part of everyone's life from time to time ? so I wanted to check off all those boxes that would assist my customers in making the transition.

?The next set of boxes was about how does the building support us better than where we are now to conduct business. Of course, it's about space, it's about storage, and, for when we get past pandemic days, and we will, this space is just fantastic for us to have some wonderful community gatherings and events. It just lends itself beautifully to it, right from a front door to a backdoor entrance for customers, to a kitchen, to washrooms, to beautiful light coming in from five west-facing windows. These things all spoke largely to me in terms of opportunity that does not exist where we are currently.?

Once there is a return to normalcy, Ms. Clark hopes to host events that are focused on clothing and fashion, of course, but also give back to the community.

?That's what makes me happy,? she says. ?It's one thing to be an owner of a business, be successful and have a good bottom line, but what makes me really happy is when we can have an event that gives back to one of the many deserving organizations that serve and support our community. That's why I am in a community business and why I want to be right here in the heart of our community.?

?It's a brand-new chapter for a store that has thrived, endured and been loved by so many in this Town. As a steward of this business, I really feel excited and grateful to know that we are securing a very lovely new chapter.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter