

Downtown merchants say 'Why Not?'

FRANK JULIANO

MILFORD - Ann Maher and Steve Rathbun are the type of people who look at a challenge and say, "Why not?"

Maher said that was how they decided to open their downtown boutique, called Why Not?, two years ago and why they've decided to move to a much larger space next month.

Maher and Rathbun are part of the next wave of downtown merchants, who increasingly are taking over spaces once used as professional offices, said Robert Kapusta, the chairman of the city's Economic Development Commission.

"Retail brings more retail, and more retail means more traffic," Kapusta said Monday. "The more traffic, the better," he said, referring to the kind of foot traffic that can crowd sidewalks with frenzied shoppers.

Lawyers, financial planners and mortgage brokers are starting to give way to stores along Broad Street, a trend that Robert Gregory, the city's economic development director, applauded. "I've always been an advocate of having the offices and apartments on the second floor and retail in the storefronts.

"Why Not? is a unique business with great window displays and they are a draw," the city official said of Maher and Rathbun's shop.

The partners are more than doubling their floor space by moving from 19 River St. to 8 Broad St., filling the two storefronts that had been occupied by Lilith's Loom.

The Personas Mortgage Co. has moved from the street level to the second floor of the landmark Krieger Building at the corner of Broad Street and Factory Lane, freeing up a key storefront.

"That had been the Krieger Department Store for many years; I used to get my Boy Scout uniforms there," Gregory said. Krieger's would be small by today's big-box standards, but the city official recalled its inventory as extensive for the day.

Commercial real estate agent Bill Parry is working with the building's owner and its long-term leasee to sublet the Kreiger storefronts at 2-4 Broad St. to retail tenants.

"It will probably need to be two separate businesses rather than one store taking the whole space," Parry said. "But that is a landmark corner and we want stores in it."

The last store in the space was Re-cycled, which sold new items made from recovered materials and refurbished items. It closed more than five years ago.

Robert Smith, the owner of the building that housed the Carter Mario law firm on Broad Street, said recently that he hopes to find a retail tenant for the site. Mario moved his firm to a new building on Cherry Street.

The former PDQ Mailing shop on River Street will be taken over by Manifest Beads, which is moving from New Haven Avenue.

Gregory said a bakery would be high on his list for new downtown businesses. Wolf's Bakery closed nearly 20 years ago.

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