

One on One: Amy Lynn Chase, owner of Crompton Collective

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WORCESTER — The Canal District is at the heart of Worcester’s revitalization, and Amy Lynn Chase has helped to make it a vibrant destination since the boards were removed a decade ago from arched windows at the shuttered former Crompton Loom Works, 138 Green St.

Ms. Chase, 38 and a lifelong Worcester resident, had been looking for permanent space for her then-Boston-based mobile clothing store, The Haberdash. She had been hunting in Boston and Somerville, but fell in love with the Crompton Place building.

Problem was, she didn’t need all the 9,000 square feet of space offered for lease to her on the lower level. So she asked her artisan friends if they’d like to have her carry their handmade products and antiques in a store that she owned. Thirty-two readily said yes, and in 2012 Crompton Collective was born. Now 99 makers sell their wares there.

In 2014, Ms. Chase opened The White Room, a 5,000 square-foot venue for weddings and events, which extends to a small courtyard. It’s booked almost every Saturday from May through October.

The Haberdash clothing and gift boutique did find its first permanent home, in Hudson, in 2017. Ms. Chase opened the second Haberdash in February, in 1,600 square feet on the main level of Crompton Place.

She also founded the Canal District Farmers Market.

Ms. Chase, a graduate of the former Worcester Vocational High School and Quinsigamond Community College, owns a house in the Grafton Hill neighborhood near Lake Quinsigamond, where she lives with her dogs Olive, Penny and Emma.

You had managed some businesses in Boston before, right?

I opened up in 2009 both my other businesses. One was an event planning company called The Swapaholic. We would host these big events where girls would bring clothes they're not wearing from their closets and swap them out with other girls.

Then that company sold, which is now swap.com. It's online still.

The other business was the mobile shop, The Haberdash, which started as vintage clothing. We would do outdoor music festivals and pop-up shops.

The mobile shop opened in 2009 and it was in the New York Times a month later. And then it was in every single news publication for probably three years straight. It was before the food truck thing hit, so people were impressed and thought it was the coolest idea. But I think they're all over now.

Over the years it's transformed into all new clothing and no more vintage, because the antique store downstairs has a lot of vintage.

Are there clothing lines you like?

Yes, we carry Free People, which is probably our most popular brand. It's probably our highest priced item. We carry a bunch of smaller designers. We have some that are, like, organic cotton T-shirts, then we have others so that it's all over the map.

Were you always into clothing?

Oh yes, for sure. I was obsessed with clothes when I was little. I would go to thrift stores in high school and try to buy something that no one would have.

Could you talk a little about, is there a Worcester style? Is there going to be Worcester fashion week?

I don't always think of it as fashion, I think of it more as style. I want to be comfortable and I want to have a good style. I think that more is what Worcester is about. It's not high fashion, it's about looking cute and being comfortable and being accessible.

People used to think Worcester was all about Spag's: It's got to be cheap. Is that still a retail theme?

I don't think that is Worcester anymore. I see a lot of diversity, too. There's still people who love a deal and there's people who love high end, who love good quality and are willing to pay for it.

I would still love Spag's if it were open today, but I still want to wear designer jeans. I think it is a little give and take. I think a lot of Worcester is like that.

Do people come here from outside of Worcester or are we still our own best-kept secret?

We did a poll of ZIP codes, when we were doing a postcard campaign for the Canal District. There was 147 ZIP codes in the span of two hours. Most of them were out of Worcester and out of Central Mass.

My staff just told me someone came in from Florida because she found us on Instagram. We get that all the time. With social media, people find us from all over and make it a point to make a day trip out of it.

Tell me how you use social media.

I love social media. We use Facebook and we use Instagram a lot. I love Instagram because it's so photo-heavy.

We show our customer what came in today. We don't do any models, it's just our staff wearing the clothes. I think it makes it more real and approachable for everyone to see our staff.

What has really resonated with the Worcester market here? What do you think needed a little tweaking?

The shoppers for sure love coming back to local and caring about where their products are from, where their food is from. The farmers market is busy every Saturday here. I think the whole local aspect is what people love about this building. I think the values of people are changing back to small and community.

I think we all just came in here doing what we love and people accepted us.

Is there a good network for young entrepreneurs in Worcester?

I think when I started, there wasn't. And now there's so many new business owners and especially young women that are starting businesses, which is so cool to me. I've made so many new friends. There is a great support group and it's very collaborative, which is great. I don't know if you would find that in a bigger city.

What would you like to see happen next here in the neighborhood?

We have so many good restaurants, and the retail is following the restaurants. I'd like to see more retail pop up. When I'm walking somewhere, I want to walk to 10 stores, instead of just five.

Compiled by Susan Spencer, Telegram & Gazette Staff