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Women really mean business in Elizabeth

BY JIM SWENSON jim.swenson@thmedia.com 7 hrs ago



Annamarie Pintozzi owns the Small Town Saloon in Elizabeth, Ill. She is one of nearly 20 female business owners in the town of less than 1,000 that was named after three Elizabeths.

Jim Swenson



Heidi Ries

ELIZABETH, Ill. — The city's namesake three Elizabeths probably are rolling around gleefully in their graves.

This Jo Daviess County community of about 750 people boasts nearly 20 women who own local businesses. Many of the shops are on U.S. 20, which turns into Main Street.

The stores range from gift outlets to taverns, from a coffee shop to a bright pink store with an adjacent giant pink wooden chair.

"There are so many of us who care about Elizabeth that we've made the conscious effort to open businesses in town," said Annamarie Pintozzi, 45, owner of Small Town Saloon at 111 N. Main St. "It really is a great collaboration of all of us working together."



Jonna Dittmar

"It's hard to explain, but I think it's pretty cool," added Heidi Ries, 37, who owns Hairspray Salon and Boutique at 118 N. Main St. "Only 30 percent of business owners in the United States are women," based on a 2015 report from the Institute of Women's Policy Research.

Legend has it, the town got its name in the early 1830s after three women named Elizabeth stood next to their husbands and others to defend the local fort against Sauk Indian Chief Black Hawk.

"It just seems very natural having so many women in town own businesses," said Jonna Dittmar, 39, who owns the Dittmar Orchard Station with her mother-in-law, Peg Dittmar, 60. "It's how we're operating in Elizabeth. I'm excited to be part of it."

E Town Coffee, 141 N. Main St., has become a gathering place for some of the owners.



Lisa Walters

"I've always wanted to do something like this and the opportunity presented itself," said Jodi Korte, who opened E Town about a year ago. "The community of Elizabeth has been real supportive."

Male business co-owner Al Limani, at The Welcome Inn on the corner of North Main and East Myrtle streets, knows where he stands among the ladies.

"My wife (Lulie) is the one who owns the business," said Limani, a chef. "I'm nobody. But I kind of like it. I'm one of those guys who believes that a woman can do anything better than a man."

Village President Mike Dittmar, Jonna's husband, chalks it up to a positive community feeling.

"I look at it, not as women, but young entrepreneurs," he said. "The last nine years, we've established a nice, friendly atmosphere in Elizabeth."

Tammy Trebian, 43, was talked into moving her Common Cents Retail business from Dubuque to Elizabeth about five years ago.



Lara Walters

"We're real happy here," said Trebian, who now is the vice-president of the Elizabeth Area Chamber of Commerce, which is presided over by another woman, Merri Sevey. "We're still a big supporter of Hospice of Dubuque. A lot of our Dubuque customers followed us over here."

Another downtown tavern is run by a woman named Lisa Walters.

"In Elizabeth, more women tend to step forward," said Walters, who has co-owned Jug's Main Street Tap for eight years with her husband, Justin. "We consider ourselves more of a family place. The joke is, we're the McDonald's of Elizabeth."

About a block away, the big sign above Small Town Saloon still reads "Dually's Bar & Grill." Pintozzi bought it about four years ago and she is torn over the sign, which includes, in smaller letters, "Cheap Drinks, Lousy Food, Rotten Service."

"None of that is true, but a lot of customers say they stopped in after reading the sign," she said with a laugh, noting the neon sign in the window has the correct name. "We really don't mind getting the business."

Those customers also might have heard about the saloon's award-winning burgers, named the best in Jo Daviess County and among the top five in the state by the Illinois Beef Association. Pintozzi uses only homegrown meat from her farm, which is processed by a local butcher.

Sixty-three-year-old Cheryl Rife was born and raised in town. She has owned The Three Elizabeths Guest House, named after the original fighting pioneer women, for about four years.

Elizabeth female business owners

Here are some of the businesses owned/co-owned by women in Elizabeth:

- Cajun Jack's Bar & Grill, 1336 U.S. 20: Jacky (Mills) Jacobs
- Common Cents Resale, 136 N. Main St.: Tammy Trebian
- Dittmar Orchard Station, 106 Diagonal St.: Jonna and Peg Dittmar
- E-Town Coffee, 141 N. Main St.: Jodi Korte

- Galena Jeep Rentals, 212 Roberts Lane: Katie Anne Ries and Josh Ries
- Hairspray Salon & Boutique, 118 N. Main St.: Heidi Ries and Alisha Palmer
- Hoskins Building Center, 106 & 107 E. Myrtle St.: Pam and Eric Wheelwright
- Jane Marie Boutique, 3509 S. Eby's Mill Road, Tiffany Altfillisch Patterson
- Jug's Main Street Tap, 200 N. Main St.: Lisa and Justin Walters
- Shop on the Hill Antiques, 504 S. Main St.: Patsy Schaible
- Simply Be Massage Therapy, 118 N. Main St.: Kate Brondyke
- Small Town Saloon, 111 N. Main St.: Annamaria Pintozzi
- The Clothes Bin & Gift Shop, 148 N. Main St.: Judy Mantzke Meyerhofer
- The Three Elizabeths Guest House, 101 W. Main St.: Cheryl Rife
- The Welcome Inn, 102 N. Main St.: Lulie Limani and Al Limani
- Three Sisters Sweet Shoppe, 224 N. Main St.: Lara Walters
- Village Treasures, 134 N. Main St.: Heather and Kathy Wand

Source: Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce

"I have an ancestor from that battle, but her name was Rebecca," she said with a laugh.

"It's a real exciting time for the town," Rife added. "It shows the passion we have for bringing business back to Elizabeth."

The business that perhaps benefits most from the busy traffic flowing through town is the everything-pink Three Sisters Sweet Shoppe. Owned by Lara Walters, 42, its name comes from her three daughters.

"It was my husband's idea to paint it pink and have the big pink chair," that can seat three, she said. "We see U-turns all of the time," from cars passing by, but immediately coming back to visit.

The small shop is open on weekends this time of year. It features ice cream, cupcakes, candies and a variety of eclectic toys and gifts.

When asked where other businesses owned by women in town might be, she said, "The better question is, 'What business isn't owned by a woman?'"

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