

The Corner Closet

By Cory McCrindle, Northwest Business Centre



Colleen Vennechenko

It's called The Corner Closet, but it certainly isn't cramped for space. The women's clothing store in Emo sits on the site where a corner store used to stand, but the building now also includes a laundromat, a gift shop, office space and a vehicle licensing bureau.

Colleen Vennechenko and her business partner Marg Heyens have been minding the store for about seven years. In addition to clothing, The Corner Closet sells accessories, undergarments, lingerie, and jewelry. "From our closet to yours," offers Vennechenko, "that's our little slogan." Colleen Vennechenko was born and raised in Emo, and describes it as a nice place to grow up in and to raise your kids. She and her husband have a 29 year old son and a 22 year old daughter. "I love the town," proclaims Colleen, "that's likely why I've stayed here, married here, and raised my family here."

Marg Heyens grew up in Fort Frances, but has lived in Emo for the past 21 years, raising three daughters and one son here. She has also lived in Ignace. "Small towns are wonderful to live in and the people are friendly," says Heyens, adding "Emo is a growing town and I plan to stay here."

Colleen Vennechenko says that Emo has managed to weather some trying times of late due to fears that both of the forest industry mills in the area might close. "Kenora had been hit, Dryden had been hit, Thunder Bay had been hit," recalls Colleen, adding "you didn't know what was going to happen." In the end, both local mills remained open. In fact, despite the concerns, Vennechenko says Emo's population has grown. Colleen estimates that over the past few years the number of people in the town has risen by about one hundred. "(On) Front Street about a year ago, even a year and a half ago, there (were) three vacant buildings," says Vennechenko, "they're now all full.

We have a subdivision north of Emo (that) just keeps adding more houses to it...and we have the mill, the mill is helping, it's bringing new people into town."

Meanwhile, The Corner Closet has experienced growth by attracting clientele from outside Emo. "We get a lot of out-of-towners," says Vennechenko. "We have special clients that we send clothing to in Thunder Bay, we have ones from Winnipeg, and we have actually some ladies from Kenora that stop in on their way every six weeks, faithfully," asserts Colleen, "and Fort Frances is very supportive." Vennechenko says a big reason for that out of town support is because her store offers items the competitors do not. "We have some unique stuff that you can't get anywhere else," smiles Colleen, "and we only order in (quantities of) fours or sixes, so not everybody is walking around with the same thing that you have on. That's the last thing you want to see is somebody walking down the street wearing an outfit that you have on and looking even better in it!"

Both Colleen Vennechenko and Margaret Heyens came from careers in banking. Colleen says she was relieved to leave the pressures of the financial industry behind. "I hated my job," recalls a frowning Vennechenko, "the last year and a half I worked there, I hated my job." Now, as her own boss, Colleen says she's enjoying having some degree of control over her future. "I get to work early...and I love the people," beams Colleen, adding "I mean anybody can walk through that door and I treat them as if it was me walking through that door." And that treatment, she says, includes being honest with someone who is trying on clothing. "I make sure my customers, if they don't look good, I tell them," says Vennechenko, "that's a reflection on me.

If you'd like your clothing to make a good reflection on you, visit Colleen Vennechenko and Margaret Heyens at The Corner Closet, located at the corner (naturally) of Queen Street and Highway 11-71 in Emo. Perhaps you can pick up some nice items to help fill your own closet.