

# Waterfront gift gallery closes its doors

By Michaela Kennedy

Rena and Randy Tyson's shop, more famously known as R & R Gallery, has closed its doors on waterfront row. Sunday, the last day of September, marked the passing of a successful chapter in the business annals of Jamestown history.

Rena Tyson, affectionately known as the Beanie Baby lady, admits she will miss the children that have streamed in and out of her artisan shop at East Ferry over the last 15 years. From wall paintings to miniature stuffed animals, Rena's shop appealed to a wide and eclectic spectrum of shoppers. Some items were high-end, others were priced right for a child's budget. "People could always find something they wanted," she said about her gift selection.

The gallery was not a planned enterprise, according to the couple. Rena saw the waterfront space as a good spot to do the bookkeeping for their rental properties. They bought the unit, and Rena set up office. Inspired by the foot traffic, Rena contacted local artists through the Conanicut Island Art Association, and created a gallery space. She found her niche.

Rena knew, however, that she could not succeed with just paintings, since the price range was high. She honed her vision. "I liked the idea of having a place where kids can come and shop," she recalls. Rena brought other gift items into the store, and the business took off.

"There's the Beanie Baby lady!" a child once yelled out to Rena Tyson while she was shopping about



Randy and Rena Tyson

town. Rena reminisces about the many young faces that brightened her counter over the years, and how happy they were to recognize her, too. "It was good therapy for me," she adds. "I loved to have people come in and look around."

One day, Rena says, a little boy wanted to buy a toy, but his father wanted him to wait until they went to Newport. The boy became upset, but Rena put the treasure aside for the boy. "If you want it after you come back from Newport, I'll have it in the corner for you," she told him. They were waiting the next day for the door to open, she laughed.

The island merchant has a background in education. She taught various business subjects, and eventually became a guidance counselor.

But in 1988, Rena suffered injuries from an automobile accident, which limited her steps to the aid of a walker. She could no longer keep up with the physical demands of work in the school system. She considered returning to a school to do volunteer work, but the daily

mobility was beyond her ability.

The local businesswoman admits the storefront was physically demanding for her to handle alone now. Rena will spend more time with her husband and focus on keeping healthy. "I'm going to take care of myself and exercise," she plans. She also plans to spend at least one day a week with her 2-year-old grandson.

As Rena sits for one of the last times in her shop, The Beanie Baby lady throws a wistful gaze past the counter to the boat traffic in the marina. "I will miss looking out on the bay."

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