

BUSINESS PROFILE

Antiquing it across the country

BY EVAN WILLIAMS
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Red-haired, soft-eyed Susan McCurdy brought her silver tea kettles, assorted dolls, 1930s Fiesta ware, Victorian antiques, sweet perfumed candles and shabby chic cabinets to a small white house on 2016 Jackson Street in downtown Fort Myers.

McCurdy calls this neighborhood "The Antique District," the area south of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard that includes the bus station, police station, library and a number of antique shops and restaurants. Her business, "Ivy Cottage Antiques," is located across the street from the historical museum.

She has rented the more than 100-year-old space since last January, and said finding it was her own good fortune. But it's all due to her antique dealing neighbor, Jessie Williams, who owns her own shop on Peck Street across from the police station, called "The Fancy Flamingo."

"I wanted to find a building in the Antique District," McCurdy said. "And this was perfect. I had looked everywhere, from Palm Beach Boulevard to Lehigh Acres. I walked into the Fancy Flamingo one day because it was raining out, and Jessie walked up to me and said, 'C'mon, I have something to show you. Don't hate me if I'm wrong, but I really believe the person moved out of this little building down the street.' So in the rain, sharing an umbrella, she walked me over here. We looked in the window and I took down the phone number and called them. The building needed a little work, but here we are today."

McCurdy, 55, was born and raised in Lodi, N.J. and moved to Fort Myers 19 years ago,

where she met her second husband (her first husband is deceased). At the time she was teaching creative writing to adults on evenings at Cape Coral High School. During the day she ran the clinic at Trafalgar Middle School. But soon, she and her husband set off across the country.

"The company that he worked for subcontracted with environmental engineers to clean up polluted sites around the United States, so we traveled all over the place," she said. "That's how I fell in love with antiques, because I quit teaching to travel with him."

They both had the weekends off and spent them exploring. Wherever the job had taken them — be it Wyoming, Indiana, Michigan or New York — they would have breakfast on Saturday morning, then pick a random direction and start driving.

"We would just go down the road and hit every antique store on the way," she said. "One day we went from Wyoming to Deadwood, S.D. and spent the night. The next day we went to Mount Rushmore. It was just continuous fun."

The McCurdys hopped around like this for about five years, before he subcontracted with the Navy to work on an environmental cleanup in Jacksonville that would take five years to finish. By this time, she had built up a collection and started dealing antiques.

"It was a large city, historic," she said. "It was just like being up north, with the oak and maple trees and it got cold in the winter. No snow though."

But she had always kept a home in Fort Myers, and when her husband finished the job in Jacksonville, they moved back. She had so many antiques that they filled two storage lockers. McCurdy started storing some of her products at The Fancy Flamingo, where she met Williams.

It's not as busy as this time last year, she said, but she's happy. A steady stream of morning customers usually thins

Discounts are available at Ivy Cottage due to lack of business



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

Susan McCurdy in front of her store, Ivy Cottage Antiques & Candles

by the afternoon. Last Friday afternoon, McCurdy stood alone in the front room of her shop, in the natural light of the front window. Outside, the street was empty.

"It's always quiet late afternoon on Fri-

day," she said. "I guess everybody's anxious to go home. There must be some reason."

The hours at Ivory Cottage Antiques are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. ■



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