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Clyde and Audrey Shedd finish hanging clothes in a consignment portion of the Mini-Mall, which opens Friday.

JESSICA NELMS | STAFF

Ram Cat-ready: Bergens reopens its doors

BY ANDREW MOORE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Audrey Shedd and her husband, Clyde, are hoping to make a splash in the heart of downtown Seneca.

The Shedds, who have been married for 31 years, are renting out vendor space within the old Bergens building, which used to house Bergens Department Store for more than 50 years before the former owner closed it in 2008.

While the Bergens sign will remain visible amid the rows of art shops and restaurants in historic Ram Cat Alley, it will be known as "The Mini-Mall," and small retailers will be allowed to set up their own booths on the 8,000 square feet of floor space. Consignment and resale is expected to be the specialty.

The Bergens Mini-Mall will open Friday, 10 a.m. with a grand opening, ribbon-cutting ceremony, ushering new activity into the historic building.

"We're excited to get more traffic through here," said John Guidera, who owns Ram Cat Alley's Patina on the Alley with his wife, Kim.

"It's good to see more people realizing you can get unique items here and know the money is going to stay in the local economy."

The Shedds will offer small vendors month-to-month leases and are being selective regarding what kinds of operations are allowed.

"We wanted to stay away from the flea market concept, where they'll just go in that day and throw their stuff down on a table," Clyde said. "We could have had all the space filled up here if we wanted to go that route."

Currently, the operation only has four vendors, with plenty of room for more. Right now, floral, antiques and consignment dominate the Mini-Mall.

"These vendors will come in, name their own store and then stay with their store and merchandise," Audrey said. "It's like a little mall, which is why we named it the Mini-Mall."

Evelyn Owen, owner of Circa 1930 restaurant, was pleased with the idea of attracting more traffic to the area.

"The more you have on a street, the more people you attract," Owen said.

Lucinda Becker, owner of The Red Door, emphasized the need to fill the vacant buildings that dot downtown Seneca.

"We don't like empty buildings," Becker said. "The more you have, the wider range of people it appeals to. We want all these buildings filled."

This will be the Shedd's third business venture. In 2005, their resale and consignment shop, Family Thrift, moved to Oconee Square and changed its name to New To You. That business was sold in 2006.

So far, the enterprising couple has spread the word of the vendor space at their new business through newspaper advertisements, flyers and word of mouth. The Mini-Mall will be open Thursdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

andrew@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6684