

‘Room for Everybody’: Business Model Includes Supporting Other Companies’ Specialties

Image



At [Fill My Jar](#), visitors can find owner Annette Pardun’s homemade toffees, caramels, and barks in special flavours. “We wanted to make it a place where everyone from kids to adults could come in and enjoy,” she says.

Annette says making sure every customer comes away happy means actively working with other companies beyond her store in Brookfield, a Chicago, Illinois suburb.

A hand-crafted wood bar made by a local woodworker holds buckets filled with penny candy for the kids, while grownups can find specialty candy from

their childhoods.

The personalized attention of small businesses may have become even more important to people after they had to be physically distant from one another.

“The adults are really enjoying the nostalgic section that we have,” Annette says. “We bring back a lot of the razzles, the moon pies and what they enjoy.”

Non-candy specialties include handmade candles from the [Collective Harmony Company](#), a small business in a suburban Chicago home studio that uses natural and local ingredients.

Some Fill My Jar candies include nuts, so Annette worked with a Pennsylvania chocolatier to source products from a nut-free facility — something that has helped some of her customers enjoy a holiday tradition.

“One woman came in and told me it was the first time her daughter had ever had a chocolate Easter bunny in her basket,” Annette says. “She’s 16 years old.”

Other customers also told Annette that having nut-free options was important to them. “It makes me happy that I’m servicing a community that I didn’t realize was so big, on things that I can bring into the store,” she says.

Annette started selling her sweets in March 2016 through craft shows and other indoor events before Fill My Jar had a permanent location.

On a trip to Chicago, she noticed a woman selling jewelry in an office building lobby. Annette inquired, and learned that some downtown businesses allow vendors to apply for popups.

Annette started doing popups, and she told other small business owners how to get involved in selling their products during the week.

For Annette, competition from other entrepreneurs was less of a concern than people who worked in the offices not having a chance to buy products frequently at a popup.

“It’s a different clientele than what you’re going to get at a craft show,” she says. “You want to help businesses grow, and the more people who go into a popup down in the city, the more people in those buildings get used to having people there.”

It was a good strategy — popups helped Fill My Jar expand their presence.

“I got to know a lot of people who were buying gifts for clients or sending out gifts to their employees, or the management team would want to do treats for their building,” Annette says. “Not only was I selling the couple of jars of candy to passersby, but I built a nice clientele.”

Annette’s focus on mutual co-operation and support helped her maintain her brick-and-mortar store, which was purchased in January 2020 and had its grand opening on Feb. 6, 2021.

Image



Annette Pardun's store, Fill My Jar, features homemade toffees, caramels, and barks. Located in Brookfield, a Chicago, Illinois suburb, Annette also supports other local and national small businesses. Photo courtesy of Annette Pardun.

The building's interior was under renovation between January 2020 — “before we knew the world was going to close down” due to the COVID-19 pandemic — and January 2021.

Popups and other events were cancelled during the pandemic. A [Brookfield Facebook page](#), and appreciative locals, kept Fill My Jar alive through their support.

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“People were starting to already realize that they miss having the baker; they miss having the butcher,” Annette says. “If the pandemic did anything it pushed that much quicker. People are really appreciating small businesses more than ever.”

Even as “people go out of their way now to work with small businesses,” Annette says, there is “room for everybody.”