



features

on a once-stodgy saint paul corner, boutiques blossom

DAN HEILMAN | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 01, 2010



When Martha Gabler Lunde decided to move her 12-year-old flower shop, [Martha's Gardens](#), from its previous location at University Avenue and Highway 280, she went to a familiar location to think about it. Lunde grew up near Selby Avenue and Howell Street in St. Paul, so she retreated to the nearby corner of Selby and Snelling Avenue for a workout at [The SweatShop](#) and a cup of coffee at the neighboring Starbucks. After that, she crossed the street to the Legacy Rose Building, and knew she'd found a new home.

"I could really see how I would fit in there," Lunde says. "That corner really has a personality all its own."

Lunde is referring to the northwest corner of Selby and Snelling, which has quietly undergone a renaissance in recent years. The retail environment elsewhere near the intersection has remained stable – establishments such as [O'Gara's](#), [Cadenza Music](#), [The Photographer's Guild](#), and [Associated Bank](#) (formerly Liberty State Bank) have been neighborhood fixtures for decades. But the northwest corner, featuring the Legacy Rose Building and the Heritage Rose Professional Building west of it, have given the area a unique character.

Legacy Rose is the retail hub of the corner, featuring Martha's Gardens, which is at the former site of [Rebel Ink Baby](#); clothing boutique [A. Michele](#); The Drawbridge antique store; vintage clothing store [Lula](#); [Initially Yours](#)

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[Boutique](#); designer clothing store [Allee Metro Chic](#); and the [Two Smart Cookies](#) bakery.

A Corner's Makeover

That's a dramatic change from years past, when the corner was dominated by a sporting goods store, with such relatively meat-and-potatoes establishments as a day-labor contractor down the street. (One holdover from that era, A-1 Lock Service, is still going strong.)

Lula owner Hayley Bush has been on Selby just west of Snelling since 1992, so she's had a front-row seat to the corner's metamorphosis. "M&L Sports had been on the corner for 12 years when I moved in," she says. "That was the vibe of the corner--people would come to the corner to go to M&L Sports, get their skates sharpened or visit Cinderella Shoes, and that was about it. Maybe they'd visit the barbershop down the street.

"It wasn't very boutique-y--people didn't come here to go shopping per se."

Bush chose her location because of its visibility as one of the most heavily traveled intersections in St. Paul. But over time, stores like Lula have become the rule there rather than the exception, thanks in large part to owner Ed Conley, whose CCI Properties bought the Legacy Rose Building and the Heritage Rose Professional Building in 2007.

"It began changing before Ed bought the building, but shortly after that he worked really hard to improve the exterior and interior," says Bush. "Now it's completely different--it has more of a Grand Avenue vibe."

Renovation, Preservation, Legacy

The 28,000-square-foot Legacy Rose Building--which celebrates its 100th birthday this year--was posted for condemnation when CCI bought it; the subsequent renovation not only won an award from the [St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission](#) and the St. Paul chapter of the [American Institute of Architects](#), but attracted a thematically cohesive group of retailers that has made the area a big draw--especially for women. A recent "candlelight shopping" evening event at Legacy Rose, featuring wine and a pianist, drew hundreds of shoppers, almost all female.

"The atmosphere there is consistent, but also pretty eclectic," says Conley. "Everyday People is more basic, while A. Michele and Allee are more high-end. But all the shop owners, every one, has put in a tremendous amount of energy and imagination. Some of these people started their concept in their basement."

A European Arrangement

The stores are arranged in a way that encourages shoppers to go from one to the next--many of the stores look out over a French-themed half-alley and a separate courtyard, encouraging browsing and foot traffic.

"It has a lot of character, and a very charming, almost European feeling," says Flirt Boutique owner Jessica Girard, who moved here in June 2009. "You don't know what's going to be around the corner."



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spaces in his buildings, but he's also been careful to offer the spaces to retailers that won't clash with each other.

"The spot where Martha's ended up, I could've rented several times," he says. "But I was really trying to pick someone who would complement the other shops, and ultimately complement the neighborhood."

Aimee Richcreek Baxter, who opened [Heddy Freddy Handbag System](#) in the Heritage Rose Building last April, was impressed by CCI's willingness to accommodate her with a space that could contain both a work room and a showroom for her wares. "I didn't want to be on the street," she says. "I wanted semi-retail, I guess. It was the perfect hybrid for me, and the rent is better than it would be in a pure retail space. The benefit is that I'm now part of that group of stores – it's a good community of retailers."

Happy tenants means minimal turnover, which Conley says lends stability not just to his property, but to the neighborhood overall.

"Ed's pretty epic," says Lunde. "When I see the support he has for his tenants, and that his tenants have for each other, I'm glad I'm here."

Dan Heilman profiled Twin Citians who live car-free in the October 20th issue of The Line.

Photos, top to bottom:

The Legacy Rose building, retail hub of Selby-Snelling's northwest corner

Martha Gabler Lunde, who moved her floral-design shop, Martha's Gardens, from University Avenue to Snelling and Selby

A Martha's Gardens closeup

Heddy Freddy Handbag System's Aimee Richcreek Baxter does business in the Heritage Rose Building.

The Lula vintage shop is a Selby-Snelling veteran, having been on the corner since 1992.

The coirner "has a lot of character, and a very charming, almost European feeling," according to Flirt Boutique owner Jessica Girard.

All photos by Bill Kelley

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