



What's Up Downtown?: New happenings from awnings to zen

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - The latest and greatest news of **Downtown Alton** is revealed and discussed at a quarterly forum called, "**What's Up, Downtown?**"

The event was created by **Alton Main Street (AMS)**, who facilitates the event as well. It is held at the **Jacoby Center for the Arts** every quarter. The focus of the event is local business. Local business owners give presentations and speeches regarding the

states of their businesses. **AMS Executive Director Sara McGibany** said the forum allows the public to hear news about Downtown Alton firsthand while allowing them to ask questions to the business owners.

"We are here to shine a spotlight on all the fantastic developments in our district," she said. "You can read about it and see it, but here is the place you can hear it straight from the horse's mouth and ask questions."

Speakers for the event are chosen through AMS's **Economic Gardening Committee**, which meets monthly to get new businesses to come to Alton and help facilitate the needs of existing businesses. This session's speakers included **Dave Nunnally**, who owns **Raining Zen** with his wife **Donna Nunnally**, and **Cathy Gross**, the owner of **Bluff City Grill**. **Brennan Struif** of **Lighthouse Sounds** was set to speak, but was not present.

Dave Nunnally spoke first regarding the recent expansion of Raining Zen. Raining Zen is located in the **Mineral Springs Mall** and sells a variety of objects relating to metaphysical and spiritual matters. Recently, the shop expanded into the front part of the building and now includes a clothing shop called "Indigo Moon." Dave Nunnally spoke about how he and Donna found their ways into Alton.

"We looked around a lot of places in the area, and Alton felt like home," he said.

Besides managing the shop, Dave Nunnally is also on active duty for the **U.S. Navy**. He works out of **Scott Air Force Base**, which means he has a 40-45 minute commute each day. He said he does not mind the commute, because he gets to return to Alton each night.

That feeling of finally being home is what encouraged the Nunnallies to not only open a small shop in the spring of 2015 at the **Alton Exchange Mall** on Homer Adams Parkway, but to grow their business into a brick-and-mortar location of their own, which allows them 1,300 square feet of space, compared to a maximum of 240 at their former location.

Another influence of Raining Zen's expansion was **Dan Hornsey**, the current owner of the Mineral Springs Mall building. Dave Nunnally said he walked into the building after Hornsey purchased it and said it "felt different."

"We wanted a place downtown, and I wandered into Mineral Springs," Dave Nunnally said. "I thought it felt different. When I talked to Dan over the course of an hour lunch at Bluff City Grill, we decided we would be the first new tenant that building has had in years."



Since establishing themselves in the Mineral Springs Mall, Dave and Donna Nunnally have been selling merchandise, teaching classes, offering spiritual advice and giving back to the community, which has supported them since day one.

"We take a positive and peaceful approach to life," Dave Nunnally said. "We try to be a safe place for anyone starting their spiritual journey. We do a thing called 'Pay it Forward Thursdays.' If you're the lucky customer of the day, we cover your purchase and ask that you do something good for someone else in the community who needs it."

In the future, Dave Nunnally said Raining Zen will continue to expand and possibly even offer belly dancing classes. He said they will also grow their support of other local businesses and events such as the mall's paranormal tours, which they do not facilitate, and **River Bend Yoga** having sunrise yoga on the roof.

The second speaker of the evening was Cathy Gross, of Bluff City Grill, who spoke about her current work in the former **Fraternal Order of the Eagles** building. She said the building will be converted to Bluff City Grill's new location by October at the current pace. She purchased the building on May 16, and began work the very next day.

Gross said she has had the awning and the glass-block windows removed, and is replacing them with a higher "Bluff City Blue" awning and large windows.

"When we knocked out all those glass bricks and had windows, it really opened up that dining room area," she said.

The interior of the building in its previous life was almost entirely covered in wood paneling. Gross said much of that has been replaced by drywall and the floor has been stripped and will be replaced by a sort of epoxy swirl. She said she had a wall added to the dining room as well to make it feel "less like a cafeteria."

She said the upstairs banquet hall, which may fit as many as 400 people, is "90 percent done." She hosted an Independence Day party in that hall this year, which had a great view of the fireworks on the Fourth of July.

Much of the former kitchen equipment was discarded, Gross said. She said she will be bringing all the kitchen equipment from the current location with the move.

Other work done to the building included new HVAC, a ramp into the building to make it more handicap-accessible, and new roofing. Gross said she encountered a "small hiccup" with the roofing, which delayed the opening date from September 2016 to October 2016.

Another improvement to make Bluff City Grill more kid-friendly is the sequestering of the gaming room in a small area near the upstairs sports bar. Currently, the location of gaming machines does not allow children into the establishment.

Mostly local contractors were used for the new construction efforts at Bluff City Grill.