

Former prosecutor follows dream of a grocery

Carries on family legacy with new store filled with culinary delights in Ellicott City

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Long before her days as a Maryland federal prosecutor, Donna Sanger dreamed of carrying on a family legacy in the grocery business to provide local shoppers with high quality, low-cost foods. As months turned into years, the violent crimes prosecutor knew she had to make a move for her dream to become reality.

Partnering with her sister, Diane Larriamore, Sanger's hopes finally gleamed as the two opened Park Ridge Trading Company with a ribbon-cutting ceremony July 13 on Main Street in historic downtown Ellicott City.

Passers-by gazed into the clear windows, where olive oils, salsa, sea salt nuts and soups teased the palate. Inside, customers browsed the shelves that held other goodies, like chips, pastas and desserts, as well as glassware and jewelry.

Sponsored by the Howard County Chamber of Commerce, the opening event drew the Main Street business community as well as the attention of local and state officials, including County Executive Allan Kittleman, state Del. Robert Flanagan, District 1 Councilman Jon Weinstein and Columbia Association President Milton Matthews.

"I can't believe they all came," said Sanger, 62, a Marriottsville resident. "I found the other merchants to be very welcoming and the community to be very vibrant. It's an evolving community that continues to grow and become more diverse in the types of stores it has."

One popular dish during Wednesday's celebration was the cold shrimp salad, enjoyed by, among others, cousins Nora Sweeney, of Yorktown, Va., Ann Fetterman, of York, Pa., and Sue Fontz, of Severna Park.

Its combination of diced shrimp, apricot balsamic and sweet peppers was delicious, they said.

"I love the different offerings of oil and specialty spices that you don't find in the grocery stores," Fetterman said. "These are things that are going to be special, and that's why you come to a store like this."

"You come to a city like this because it is special," Sweeney added. "That's the



STAFF PHOTO BY ANDREW MICHAELS

Park Ridge Trading Co. co-owner Donna Sanger prepares a cold shrimp salad for opening day of her business on July 13 in Ellicott City.

whole reason you would come in [this store]."

As customers dove into the spread of dips, olive oils and baked goods, Sanger said her store's high-quality healthy products were the focus behind her grandfather's success as a grocer in Park Ridge, Ill., just outside of Chicago.

Her grandfather, Julius Kelder, began the business in the early 1900s, alongside his father and brothers.

"I remember going into my grandparents' shop growing up [in the early 1960s]," Sanger said. "I grew up in the shop, recalling how they provided service to their customers and the environment there in what was then a historic district of that city. I always held onto that concept and wanted to do that some day."

While her career path led her to the federal government, Sanger said, one particular prosecution case marked the beginning of her transition into the grocery business. Known as the Hunters

Brooke arson in Charles County, the 2004 case involved a group of young men who burned down 36 houses in a development under construction.

Sanger served as a U.S. Attorney during the trials.

"Since then, I stopped prosecuting and [started] doing trial work [before retiring in 2014]," she said. "When I was a prosecutor, I saw a lot of things. You really see some of the problems in the communities and the difference some of the programs are making."

Under the motto, "Live Well, Give Back," Sanger wanted her company to donate 5 percent of its profits to a nonprofit organization each month. For July and August, Park Ridge Trading is co-sponsoring the 2 Miles for 2 Hearts Memorial Run on Aug. 27, in honor of two Ellicott City women killed by a train derailment in 2012.

"I look for a local or personal connection," Sanger said.

After 1½ years of sampling foods and searching for locations following her retirement, Sanger landed in the historic district of Ellicott City.

Perusing the local honey, Flanagan said Sanger's variety was a refreshing take on a Main Street business.

"It's a leading-edge idea, a new idea that Ellicott City needs," Flanagan said. "I think there's a creative tension brewing in Ellicott City. We love it now, but I think it can evolve into something even more exciting."

Following the cutting of the ceremonial ribbon, Sanger said she was happily surprised at the day's attendance and excited about her and her sister's new venture.

"It's something that's uniquely ours," Sanger said. "It's a creative project to create a store that reflects your personality and your interests. We've been very busy, so I think we've gotten a good reception."