

Excelsior Springs

DOWNTOWN MERCANTILE

THE EMPTY streets that showed their years like old wrinkles are springing back to health in downtown Excelsior Springs. Once drawing visitors from around the country with its healing mineral springs, the town is again showing signs of life, helped in small part by a humble bistro and retailer nestled among the old buildings.

Willow Spring Mercantile started as a simple antique shop in 2005 but quickly evolved, adding gifts, then coffees and teas, wine tastings, and finally a full kitchen.

Today, it is proud to claim the title of the largest selection of Missouri wines in the world.

“We love coffee and wine; we love relationships and food and people,” says Daphne Bowman, who owns the shop along with her husband, Jim. “When we started putting ‘us’ into the store, that’s when it became successful, and that’s when it made it fun.”

Creating a partnership with other businesses, the pair turned their attention to art and culture. That’s also when the old streets started getting used again, as this new focus attracted more visitors. “We realized that local art was an important part of our town,” Daphne says. “We’re trying to create that energy with art and the history.”

At Willow Spring, the recently added live music on the weekends has become the perfect complement to lunch and a glass (or two) of Missouri wine. Both tourist and local alike are finding their way back downtown where those healing springs seem to still be the cure. —**Matt Smithmier**

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