

Zina Gallo Brechbill's vision: Downtown is showing real signs of renewed life

Written by Zina Gallo Brechbill

Mar. 27, 2014 6:14 PM |

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The staff at Enza's An Organic Salon in downtown Salisbury are, standing from left, Rose Daly, owner/operator Zina Gallo Brechbill and Heather Malone. Seated are Christie Townsend, left, and Aubrey Schneider. / Staff photo by Laura Emmons

As I was being driven down Route 50 heading east, new to the area, my real estate agent said, "if you look to the right, that is the city of Salisbury."

That was 19 years ago. The beauty of the architecture captured my heart.

The staff at Enza's An Organic Salon in downtown Salisbury are, standing from left, Rose Daly, owner/operator Zina Gallo Brechbill and Heather Malone. Seated are Christie Townsend, left, and Aubrey Schneider.

There was something about the energy from days gone by that sparked my interest, I wanted to learn more about downtown Salisbury. Little did I know they were trying to revitalize downtown — yes, 19 years ago.

Back then, there was talk of opening the plaza back up to traffic; they had closed it in the hopes of attracting more people. The controversy went back and forth. I wondered why were there so many closed businesses, and why many of the ones that were still in business were actually closed in the middle of the day.

I was told most of the businesses had moved north to The Centre at Salisbury mall. As far as I was concerned, downtown was a diamond in the rough.

I was intrigued upon hearing from the local older generation about how wonderful it used be. They shared great stories and memories with me. My curiosity led me to the library to look for books on Salisbury's history. There it was — images of our beautiful downtown, with hustle and bustle in the streets!

Did you know that our city burned down twice? The old buildings that are left behind survived those horrible fires.

I knew that one day, it could be how it used to be, if only we spoke with hope and confidence of our beautiful city.

Instead, I would frequently hear negative comments: "Downtown is dead," "no one wants to come down here," "it's not safe" or "it's dirty."

Heartbreaking as it was to hear these negative comments, I saw something else. I saw hope, beauty, history, character, charm, an appealing landscape and many wonderful people who work

in those buildings.

My dream was to one day open a business downtown. Against all odds, it happened. More than seven years ago, I opened Enza's, Salisbury's first green hair salon. It was the first organic salon on the Eastern Shore.

Being there five and six days a week, I've experienced firsthand some of downtown's issues.

In my opinion, the biggest one is the parking. Having to feed the meters is a huge issue. It is not so much having to pay to park, but more about having to watch your time to make sure the meter doesn't run out of time, or pulling up and realizing you do not have the correct change.

Who can enjoy shopping, dining or getting their hair done worrying about their meter running out of time and possibly getting a \$10 ticket? The parking issue could be resolved with one of those meter boxes that allows you to pay with your charge card, like they have in Rehoboth Beach — or better yet, we could eliminate meters, like Berlin has done.

If you are watching closely, there are some amazing things going on downtown.

Our 3rd Fridays, which began more than four years ago, have put us back on the map.

We have some positive people who are breathing new hope and life back into our city; it is contagious. Positive feeds positive, and it's such a refreshing change.

New businesses are opening and old buildings are getting redone.

To continue moving forward, we need a downtown shuttle that runs throughout the day and into the evening, circling the area and making stops along the way to pick up and drop off people from parking areas to downtown businesses. People may choose to walk, but not everyone has that option, for health and other reasons.

We also need a nice-size parking space for bicycles with lots of racks. I will never forget a trip I took to my birthplace, Belgium. There it was a huge parking lot for bikes only. What a beautiful sight. I've never seen so many bikes in one place. We can do the same here — why not?

I would love to see more specialty stores: hat shops, vintage boutiques, cigar shops, a bread bakery, a vegan restaurant and an old-time deli. I would love to see fruit stands, a gelato shop and a coffeehouse with open mic nights and poetry readings that include live, original music.

An outdoor cultural streetfest and more outside cafe tables to foster socializing while enjoying the outdoors would also be nice. We need better evening lighting and more water fountains, and a music venue similar to Berlin's Globe Theater would be perfect.

A holistic store with items for yoga/meditation would also be a nice addition to the plaza. I can envision a variety of individual musicians in the streets playing their music on weekends.

A bike path from Shoemaker Pond that cuts through our downtown area and continues to Pemberton Historical Park would encourage people to stop here along the way for food and

drink.

It would also be nice to encourage Sea Gull Century participants to use downtown as part of the bike ride's return route.

Getting SU students more involved would be a good thing, maybe working booths on 3rd Fridays and painting murals along alleys and blank walls downtown. A welcome package from downtown businesses for new families in town might help.

We have the Wicomico River nearby. It should be filled with boats and paddleboats, lined with picnic areas and should feature a playground.

We are going in the right direction. There is a great vibe downtown these days, with a positive energy that is going to continue to move us forward.

Zina Gallo Brechbill is owner and operator of Enza's an Organic Salon on Salisbury's downtown plaza.