

FUN STUFF! opens with help from Walsh College

BIRMINGHAM — Birmingham resident Denise Kulak's new FUN STUFF! Boutique fulfills her lifetime dream.

"I've always wanted to own a store," said Kulak, who decided to take the entrepreneurial plunge after the economic downturn cost the 20-year retail veteran three previous retail jobs.

Opened recently at Adams Square Shopping Center in Birmingham, the store, specializing in whimsical, eclectic delights, offers a light-hearted refuge for shoppers seeking gifts of fun practically or simple entertainment.

The artfully arranged 200 square-foot store is accessorized with custom-made costume jewelry, unique greeting cards, scarves, useful conversation pieces and classic and not so classic children's books.

A small corner of the store is devoted to helping the African village of Namtenga. Handmade

works of art such as backpacks and duffel bags are displayed with the entire sales proceeds going back to Namtenga.

A master's degree candidate at Walsh College, Kulak turned to the Walsh Blackstone LaunchPad program for guidance and support. Funded through a three-year \$2 million grant from the Blackstone Charitable Foundation, and further supported by the New Economy Initiative for Southeast Michigan, Blackstone LaunchPad programs at Walsh College and Wayne State University are operating in their third year.

Patterned after the nationally acclaimed program developed at the University of Miami in 2008, the Michigan Blackstone LaunchPad's help students and alumni develop bulletproof business plans and provide mentoring — in cooperation with Automation Alley

— on the intricacies of developing, operating and running viable businesses.

"LaunchPad gave me the confidence to start on my own path," said Kulak. "They assisted me with ensuring that I was putting all the proper licensing and business plan objectives in place. They presented solid ideas regarding proper marketing, advised me on getting a domain name solidified, and helped me work through securing a proper slogan and logo. They also provided support and affirmation regarding proper business processes."

Through the everyday stresses of owning and operating a business, Kulak is energized by the fact that she alone is in charge of her economic destiny.

"I have the quality of life in knowing that it is all up to me to make it a success," said Kulak.





Denise Kulak was able to open FUN STUFF! boutique — a life-long dream come true — with the help from Walsh College's Blackstone LaunchPad program.