

## Pea Soup Makes Consignment Shopping Chic

From kids clothes to home furnishings, Pea Soup stores cater to selective shoppers who like a bargain

By Melissa James, York County Contributor



"Is this stuff used?" Pea Soup owners Ann Adcox and Suzanne Hayes field the question often. Stepping into either of their side-by-side shops on Highway 17 in Grafton, you'd indeed think you were at a pricey boutique.

What started as a small kids-consignment store has grown into an entire brand, now celebrating its 15-year anniversary. The original Pea Soup for Kids opened in 2005, in the smaller building now occupied by Pea Soup for Home.

Suzanne, who previously ran a children's consignment boutique called Tadpoles, had helped Pea Soup's first owners set up shop. She persuaded Ann—a friend and former Tadpoles employee—to come work with her at Pea Soup. Four years later, they purchased the store.



*Co-owners Ann Adcox (left) and Suzanne Hayes*

With Suzanne's business experience and Ann's degree in fashion merchandising, the women implemented new strategies to attract and serve customers. And it worked. Soon Pea Soup had racked up a large fan base—in a very

small space. When the building next door came available, both partners jumped at the chance to double their square footage. As a result, business grew even more.

“The depth of our inventory greatly expanded, especially the equipment that we take for both babies and kids,” said Ann, who now focuses on the kids side of the business while Suzanne covers the home shop.



“In the smaller store, we had basically books in two little wicker bins, and now we have whole room full of books. We can take and display so many more toys. Our newest merchandise line is a lot of new-baby gifts and toddler birthday gifts, as well as big brother/big sister gifts.”

The store is always shifting to meet customer demand. For example, they eliminated larger clothing sizes because they weren't selling, and focused instead on preemie through size 12.

“Athletic clothing for both boys and girls is very popular, and people assume we don't get a lot of it because they don't see much of it in the store, but it's because it sells quickly,” Ann said. “We've also gotten more particular about the quality—the wear on the shoes, the brands—over the years.”



She said the most unique item they've sold has been several ride-on remote control dinosaurs, which were extremely popular in the last year. She was surprised people would want toys that big.

“But it's not about what we like—it's what our market would like to buy.”

That same mindset has generated success at Pea Soup for Home, which opened in 2016 after a nail salon vacated Pea Soup's original digs next door. The same landlord owns both buildings and was happy to help them expand, said Suzanne, who called him one of Pea Soup's biggest supporters.

Ann and Suzanne conceived the new business because they felt there weren't enough home consignment stores in the area. Suzanne loves decorating, so she was eager to figure what home-décor shoppers were seeking and then meet that need.

"We want to appeal to the masses, so we bring in all different styles. Sometimes it's unique, sometimes very mainstream. The store has a transitional, eclectic look that everybody seems to like."



Cleanliness is key, she said, and is likely why so many first-time shoppers are surprised the products are second-hand. They're also drawn in by the way everything is styled.

"We don't just throw something on an empty shelf," said Suzanne. "We try to make it feel like what you could do in your own home. I love seeing all the different consignments that come in—you find unusual things they don't make anymore, or you look at something and say, 'I would put that on a table,' but someone else comes in and says, 'Oh look, I'm going to hang that on a wall!' People like to repurpose, so we bring in things people can put new use to."



While the clientele at the home store tends to be older than at the kids store, customer relationships are central to both.

"One of the big things is making people feel comfortable. It's not just walking into a brick building to look at merchandise. We're kinda like 'Cheers,' where everyone knows your name. They bring a lot to us too—we're not just providing for them, but they get to know us and our stories and want to be part of that as well," said Suzanne.

"We've gotten to know a lot of our customers and consigners pretty well over the years," echoed Ann, "since quite a few of them have been with us since their first child was born. You get that home-town community feel. There are quite a few things we do to support the local community."

Community ties run deep for both owners. Ann has lived in Tabb for 20 years, along with husband Steve and daughter Abigail, a student at George Mason University. Suzanne and her husband, Shanon, have lived in Poquoson for 16 years, with sons Taylor, 21, and Brayden, 16. In her free time, Suzanne enjoys boating, volleyball and volunteer work, while Ann's preferred hobbies are sewing, painting and hiking.

Being a small woman-owned business, rather than a big-box franchise, Pea Soup can easily and quickly adapt to changes in the community, say the owners. They have 10 part-time employees. Pea Soup for Kids has received several “Best of the 757” awards, with two in the last year. Ann and Suzanne attribute their success to smart business decisions and great customers.

“Every day is different. The merchandise is constantly changing, we’re being introduced to new people almost every day, and what we prioritize is different every day. It’s never boring,” said Ann.

Suzanne added, “It makes you feel good that people want to support your business and that you made an impression on them as a person.”

Pea Soup for Kids  
4904 George Washington Memorial Highway

Pea Soup for Home  
4906 George Washington Memorial Highway