

# 2023 PROGRESS

## CHENANGO

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### Ashby Ann makes waves in 2022

**Sarah Genter**  
Evening Sun Writer

NORWICH — Norwich native Kirsten Vidler-Mackey decided 2022 was the year to make major changes and accomplish her goals. On April 28, she opened the doors to her new store Ashby Ann, located at 24 South Broad Street in Norwich.

The store is housed in the former Arnell Music building, a historic space that Vidler-Mackey spent months remodeling with the help of her husband. The result is a warm and inviting atmosphere that she calls “industrial chic.”

Ashby Ann offers a wide variety of products, including candles, home decor, stationery, food, jewelry, soaps, purses and bags, children’s toys, clothes, and books, and much more. Vidler-Mackey said she wanted to keep her merchandise local as much as possible, and ensure the items she sold were of the highest quality.



Christmastime was the season of giving back at Ashby Ann. Owner Kirsten Vidler-Mackey supported Adopt a Solider during the holiday season by gathering donations from community members, as well as hand-written letters and drawings from local children to send to soldiers overseas. Pictured is Vidler-Mackey at a coloring station set up in the store, where local children could stop by to draw a picture to send. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

“I only have a few real mainstream lines. Everything else is ma and pa. Like, the husband and wife that sit at home, I sought after those guys,” she said. “I’d rather push the small business than they’re already huge. And sometimes they’re not bet-

ter. So I just tried to stick with oddity stuff.”

“I take pride in my work, and handing out junk is not what I like,” she added. “Everything that I have in here is quality goods: it doesn’t fall apart, it’s not stingy. I like it, it’s good stuff. I’ve tried everything. Literally everything in here

I’ve tried.”

Opening the store was a big change for Vidler-Mackey, who has 18 years of experience in retail, but spent the past ten years in the dental field. Although she said she loved her career, it was time for a

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### SUCCESS STORY

## S&S TV and Appliances named Dealer of the Year by peers

NORWICH – The S&S TV and Appliances store was honored for its commitment to excellence in the retail industry this year.

S&S TV and Appliances of Norwich, was named the BrandSource Dealer of the Year for the North Atlantic Region at the BrandSource National Convention and Expo at the Gaylord Texan in Dallas.

Co-owners Tom and Joan Brauer were honored at the buying group’s annual awards ceremony, which was held amid the hoopla of its four-day convention.

With showrooms in Norwich and Hamilton, S&S serves the greater Madison and Chenango County communities with a wide selection of home appliances from such premium brands as Amana, Danby, Electrolux, Maytag, Monogram, Samsung and Whirlpool. The company also carries TVs and assorted A/V gear and accessories, and its specially trained, in-house technicians are prepared to service all that S&S sells.

The BrandSource Dealer of the Year awards are presented annually to a member who has shown continued support of BrandSource and its direct suppliers. The Dealer of the Year must support the group by attending regional meetings as well as national events such as the Convention and Summit.

The 14 winners, which were selected by each region’s membership, demonstrate a continued commitment to excellence in the retail industry and to their fellow BrandSource dealers.

BrandSource is the leading merchandising organization for independent appliance, home furnishings and consumer tech dealers. Its parent company, AVB, is a \$19.5 billion member-driven co-op that provides merchandising, financing and digital marketing services to nearly 5,000 independent dealers in the U.S. and Canada. BrandSource’s sister divisions and affiliates include ProSource (consumer tech and custom integration); TRIB Group (rent-to-own); Mega Group (Canada); and HFA Buying Source, serving home furnishings dealers nationwide.

S&S TV and Appliances also received the New York State Senate Empire Award that was presented by Senator Frederick J. Akshar II of the 52nd senate District. This award is in recognition of outstanding contributions and dedication to the growth, prosperity and betterment of their community in New York State.

One of the main reasons that S&S had so much inventory during COVID was due to their new buying group that they became a part of called the N.E.A.G. This buying group has allowed them to keep their inventory full and order any appliances much faster. S&S would also like to thank the community for making 2022 such a great success.

### SUCCESS STORY



The Northeast Classic Car Museum is home to over 200 classic cars, most of which were manufactured in the United States, including several cars donated to the museum, as well as cars that were loaned by area residents. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)



A vintage Dino gas pump installed in front of the Northeast Classic Car Museum. The museum’s remodel features designs and elements reminiscent of a vintage car dealership. (Photo by Dustin Genter of 5th Dimension Photography)

## Northeast Classic Car Museum had record admissions in 2022

NORWICH - In 2022, the Northeast Classic Car Museum (NECCM) celebrated the successful completion of two major capital projects and its 25th Anniversary when it first

opened its doors 25 years ago, in May 1997. Thanks to the efforts of local businessman George E. Staley and his family, the Museum has grown into a major first rate tourist destination

with over 200 classic cars, motorcycles AND trucks on display in five connected buildings.

Robert M. Jeffrey, Executive Director of the Northeast Classic Car

Museum said, “For the past 25 years the Northeast Classic Car Museum has expanded its physical footprint, quadrupled the number of vehicles on display,

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# Northeast Classic Car Museum had record admissions in 2022 -

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significantly increased the numbers of visitors to the museum and advanced its reputation as a world class museum. The museum would never have made it to our 25th Anniversary year if it was not for our donors, exhibitors, supporters, volunteers, staff and dedicated members of the Northeast Classic Car Museum Board of Trustees.”

Jeffrey said, “Thanks to the late George Staley who made our museum possible and his sons, Jim Staley and Claude Staley, who continue the Staley family support of our wonderful museum.”

In 2022, the museum saw another record-setting year for visitor admissions. The NECCM continues to attract more visitors each year, and in 2022, set another record. The NECCM continues to see an increase of visitors from outside of Chenango County and from across the United States. In 2022, almost 97 percent of the museum’s visitors were from outside of Chenango County. Approximately, 10 percent of the museum’s visitors were from outside of the United States from Countries such as Canada, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia, China, Japan, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Israel.

The Northeast Classic Car Museum has been



**The Northeast Classic Car Museum, located at 24 Rexford Street in Norwich, recently completed a massive transformation to the building’s facade. The 25 year old facility stripped away the industrial siding and replaced it with a sleek vintage facade complete with massive windows and chrome detailing. (Submitted photos)**

busy continually investing in major capital projects to upgrade the appearance of the museum and the aesthetics of the museum’s surrounding property, thanks to generous community support. In 2022 the NECCM completed a major façade improvement project with the intention to be transformative, to help promote the museum’s image to visitors as a world-class museum and to reflect the automobile display that exists inside the museum. The project involved removing the old warehouse façade appearance of the museum that faces Rexford Street and construct a new museum façade that would be attractive with the appear-

ance of a vintage dealership design.

Jeffrey said, “As a result of the new façade there have been countless numbers of museum visitors taking pictures of the museum from across the street and when they enter the museum, commenting how beautiful the museum now looks.”

The ultimate goal of this project was to generate increased visitor traffic to the museum as well as start an investment into the Museum District.

The museum continues to focus its marketing efforts in multiple ways by brochure distribution, TV, print, billboards, social media, word of mouth and special events. The Museum has expand-

ed its brochure distribution into Northern New Jersey and Pennsylvania markets, as well as in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, and the Catskill and Hudson Valley Regions. Also, the Northeast Classic Car Museum is working to promote bus tours to the museum.

In 2022 there were over 40 volunteers who generously donated over 8,500 hours of their time and energy to make the Northeast Classic Car Museum a great place to visit.

Jeffrey stated, “Without the volunteers, the Northeast Classic Car Museum would not succeed.”

The Northeast Classic Car Museum’s Exhibit Committee was busy in 2022 updating the museum’s exhibits in the Pre War and Post War Exhibits, as well as the new special exhibit “Handmade Muscle – Street Rods and More.” The special exhibit features 19 Street Rods in all, with one modified for the drag strip. Jeffrey stated, “Automobile owners have been customizing their cars to reflect their own personal style since the automobile became popular and commonplace in American society. The new exhibit features a collection of American classic cars from the 1920s to the 1960s that

have been modified to have their own unique creative and distinctive personality.”

Jeffrey added, “This is an impressive exhibit to celebrate our 25th anniversary of our first opening. Both adults and children are going to enjoy this exhibit with the various styles, colors, and paint designs of the street rods.”

This exhibit will be on display through April 2023.

The museum is open daily from 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., seven days per week. The museum is on one level, wheelchair accessible and scooters are available. The museum is closed three days per year: Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and Easter Sunday.

The NECCM is an educational facility dedicated to the collection, preservation, and exhibition of vehicles related to the evolution of transportation, with particular emphasis on the role of the automobile and its impact on American culture. Additionally, it is the museum’s mission to positively impact on the local economy and promote the region by bringing visitors to the area.

If you would like more information about volunteering at the museum, call (607) 334-2886 or visit our website at [www.classiccar-museum.org](http://www.classiccar-museum.org)

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change. She credits opening Ashby Ann to her sister and husband, who encouraged her to not only dream bigger, but chase those dreams.

From there, Ashby Ann became a reality. The store gets its moniker from Vidler-Mackey's grandmothers, who she said were strong women that raised strong women.

"My grandmothers are Joan Ashby-Vidler, and then I have Beverly Ann Striechert. They were like the matriarchs of our family," Vidler-Mackey explained. "They were strong women. My grandma Bev, she raised six kids on her own. So she brought up strong women, and then those have then brought up strong women. So I'm just the grandchild of that and she raised us all to kind of do our own thing, and do it well if we were going to do it, and always strive for better."

Her Grandma Joan moved to Norwich from Coventry, England, and as Vidler-Mackey describes, "had to learn a whole new world."

"I want to dedicate this towards them because I feel that if it weren't for them maybe I wouldn't have pushed myself even harder to go outside the box. Because grandma Bev would be like, 'come on, get up and do it. You've just got to do it,'" said Vidler-Mackey. "They were just really strong, independent, loving women, and they've

always pushed me."

## First year in business

Vidler-Mackey said her first year of running the store was largely a learning experience that taught her all the facets of owning your own business.

"I had to get my feet wet this year. This year was crazy. It was learning the ins and outs, it was really getting used to the business, when the slow seasons are, when the high peaks are, and getting to know my clientele," she said. "What merchandise sells? What merchandise is sitting here still since day one? So that's what I'm getting used to."

"I'm ever learning, but I have found what works and what doesn't. A lot of things that you'd think would work in a small town do not work."

The major downswing in the economy was an unexpected hurdle, but she said it taught her how to stay flexible and adapt to changing circumstances.

"Was I expecting the economy to be a little bit better when I started this business? Yes. But obviously that did not work out. You just have to learn to roll with the punches, really," she said.

Leaving behind the job she had always loved was also a challenge at first, said Vidler-Mackey. However, after nearly a year of running the store, she realized it wasn't so much dental work she loved, it was connecting with the people that



Downtown Norwich store Ashby Ann opened its doors in April of 2022 at 24 South Broad Street in Norwich. The store sells a wide variety of items, ranging from candles to stationery, children's toys and clothes, food, jewelry, home decor, and more. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

came in.

"That was one of my biggest struggles in the beginning, because that's my passion. I love working on people's mouths. But when I really sat down and thought about it, did I really like the mouths, or did I like the people? I love people," she said.

So she crafted Ashby Ann to be a welcoming place where customers could stop in and shop comfortably, or even sit down for a cup of coffee and a chat.

"It's not about the purchases that people are making in here. It's about building lifelong friendships with the community that raised me," Vidler-Mackey explained. "It's about the relationships that you're creating, which is then mirrored onto your children, and they're going to mirror it onto their children, and so on and so forth. So that's

your future you're molding with the relationships that you're creating today."

"It's not about the store. It's not about the stuff. It's about my people, it's about my community, and seeing all the good. Seeing all the faces come through the door and all walks of life."

Promoting positivity in the community is the most important thing for Vidler-Mackey. She describes it as being the ripple that creates a wave.

## Start a wave

"My saying has always been, I might be a little ripple. But that little ripple can create more ripples, which creates a wave. And that's what I aim to do, is make a wave. And this town needs a wave, so why not be a little ripple?"

Those are words that Vidler-Mackey lives by, not just in her own life, but at her store and in the commu-

nity. Within just a month of opening Ashby Ann, Vidler-Mackey began community-centered events and activities meant to bring people together.

In May of 2022, she hosted the first Reading Circle Time, a book-reading event for children. Her goal was to have guest readers come in to read a few of their favorite books from childhood. The first event featured City of Norwich Mayor Brian Doliver as the guest reader.

"It's too fast paced now, where the parents aren't slowing down and taking the time to really enjoy that one on one with their children, to start reading, and that's why I want to start bringing this in," said Vidler-Mackey. "We need to start enriching their minds, instead of just sitting them in front of the TV."

In addition to providing an enriching and fun experience for kids, her goal was to also connect local moms.

"It's a good way for moms to network and meet other moms and talk, because they can go around and talk to other moms and stuff while we're sitting there kind of entertaining their kid," said Vidler-Mackey.

The story times continued through the summer and included other guest readers such as children's book author Suzanne Bloom for both a book reading and book signing, an employee from Visions Federal

Credit Union who taught attending children about saving money, and Improve Norwich Now Co-founder and cvFree Church Lead Pastor Jen Westervelt.

Other downtown businesses also got involved. The Cottage Bakery provided cookies for each circle time, and Minty's Candies and Treats provided treat bags for the kids.

Shortly after the inception of Reading Circle Time, Vidler-Mackey also started Sing Along events with local musicians, including Frank Revoir, Mike Davis, and Jes Sheldon.

In August, the Ashby Ann events expanded. Vidler-Mackey wanted to show support for the Norwich Fire Department (NFD) and that ripple of an idea turned into a wave of community collaboration that became Firemen's Appreciation Day.

"I just wanted to do more positive stuff for the community, and show the little guys something a little more than just readings and sing alongs. Just more fun stuff, because we need more stuff like that," said Vidler-Mackey. "It's just spreading more positivity towards the firefighters that don't really get that much acknowledgment or appreciation or days to honor just them. One day is, I don't think, enough."

The event featured a firetruck from the Norwich Fire Department as well

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as several firefighters who gave out fire safety information and plastic fireman hats to attending children, and a visit from NFD Chief Jan Papelino who showed the kids the inside of the firetruck.

“We’re going to do it out on the street side, so the kids will be able to access the driver’s side, and let parents take pictures of them maybe sitting behind the steering wheel and stuff like that,” Papelino explained before the event. “It’ll be a good time, and it’s all about the kids and hopefully they enjoy themselves, and get to spend a little time and learn a little bit about what we do.”

Papelino said he couldn’t recall the City of Norwich ever hosting a Firemen’s Appreciation Day, or something similar.

Many local businesses and individuals came together to make the event happen. Local artist Sarah Youngs did free face painting, balloons and helium were donated by Chenango Welding, a bike raffle was provided by Mackey Monuments, Minty’s Candies and Treats donated candy, the Cottage Bakery donated fire hydrant cookies, Nina’s provided food, Chobani stopped by to hand out cups of free yogurt, popcorn was donated by Deja Brew, and baskets of goodies for a giveaway were donated by several local businesses.

Additionally, the Kandi’s Kitchen food truck and Lickety Split Ice Cream parked out front of the store, and dancers from the Amber Perkins School of Dance volunteered to help with the event, in addition to several community members.

In October, not only did Ashby Ann participate in Trunk or Treat, they also hosted a children’s Halloween party. Area children were invited to come to the free event in costume for the chance to participate in a costume contest, listen to a book reading, grab a goodie bag, and enjoy tasty Halloween treats.

All the events Vidler-Mackey hosted at the store were free to attend or participate, as her goal isn’t to make money off of them, but rather provide a fun and safe environment for local children and families to connect with each other.

“Getting the community more involved and molding our future is huge for me,” Vidler-Mackey explained. “Giving our children the right tools, which means positive interactions, literacy, and playing one on one and doing all of that is so important for our future.”

“And even us as adults to interact with one another. I have a lot of stay-at-home moms that came and started interacting with other mothers, and now they hang out. They go to the parks together, or they go to Billy Bee’s, or whatever. But it’s



To support the Norwich Fire Department, Ashby Ann organized and hosted the first ever Firemen’s Appreciation Day in downtown Norwich. The event featured visits from NFD firemen, face painting, donated treats from several local businesses, gift basket giveaways, and a children’s bike giveaway. Pictured is NFD Chief Jan Papelino showing a Firemen’s Appreciation Day attendee the inside of a NFD firetruck. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

nice to see those interactions going on.”

From the time she opened the store, Vidler-Mackey wanted Ashby Ann to be an inviting place where people are comfortable to shop, talk, and meet new people, and that’s what she’s been working to cultivate in her first year of business.

“This is more than a store and I wanted it to be more than a store from day one. I wanted it to be a place where people felt comfortable to come in, have a cup of coffee, talk about their day,” said Vidler-Mackey. “I’m a talker, I’ve always been a talker, and for me to put my life into what I do and my love into other people, that’s what I’m meant to do.”

### Season of giving

As the holiday season ramped up, so did Vidler-Mackey’s efforts to support people in the area, and others beyond it. While she had spent months using Ashby Ann as a place to host community gatherings and promote connections within the community, Vidler-Mackey found even more ways to give back.

In November, she announced the store’s participation in Operation Adopt a Soldier, a Saratoga Springs-based nonprofit that aims to support US soldiers stationed around the world by sending supplies they may not have access to at base commissaries.

The organization’s mission hits close to home for Vidler-Mackey, as both her husband and father are veterans.

“My father was a veteran, and so is my husband, and it meant a lot to them,” she said. “My husband was very big on this. He’s the one that threw me the idea and said, ‘you know what, you should maybe do something. Since your thing is giving back, why not do the soldiers?’ I think this is perfect.”

For a month, the store served as a collection station for Adopt a Soldier donations such as travel-size toiletries and loofahs, notebooks, Sudoku and crossword puzzle books, pens and pencils, baby wipes, glasses lens cleaner, batteries, band aids, and decks of cards, among others.

She appealed to community members and urged their support, and emphasized that it just takes one item to make a difference.

“When you’re at the store, just pick up one item. Throw it in your cart, it’s a dollar, two dollars, three dollars. Throw one in,” she said. “I’m just asking for people to have a little bit of compassion for those that are giving so much so they could be here and have Christmas with their families. That’s all they want, to be home and have Christmas with their families, and they’re not. So let’s give back.”

Her efforts paid off, and she collected more than \$5,000 worth of donated items at her store. In total, Operation Adopt a Soldier delivered 303,000 shoe

box-sized packages filled with donated items to overseas soldiers.

“Operation Adopt a Soldier, they won’t send it just to one dedicated area,” said Vidler-Mackey. “They contact different bases, or they have an in that will contact different bases and say, okay, how many guys do you have at each base? And will cover five or six bases and ship the individual boxes.”

But the packages weren’t the only things collected at Ashby Ann. Throughout November, Vidler-Mackey also had a station set up within the store where community members and children could come in and write a letter or draw a picture to send overseas.

“It might take ten, 20 minutes out of your day. But that ten to 20 minutes out of your day means the world to that soldier that’s overseas in all this destruction. So it means a lot,” she said. “Some of them might have a little fake tree on their base, but some of them aren’t even on a base. So this picture they can hang up and that’s their tree this year.”

Supporting local organizations was also on the forefront of Vidler-Mackey’s mind, so she partnered with Fostering Futures New York Chenango County (FFNYCC) to help provide a Christmas to remember for local foster and kinship

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children.

Vidler-Mackey set up a Christmas tree in the store adorned with one ornament per child, listing their age, gender, and interests. Members of the community were encouraged to check out the tags, and purchase a toy or other gift related to a child's interests to donate.

The toys were collected at the store for several weeks, and then Vidler-Mackey held a wrapping party where she and a group of volunteers wrapped the items in gift bags, to be given to the kids during a FFNYCC Christmas Train Ride at the Cooperstown-Charlotte Valley Railroad.

Additionally, Ashby Ann collected donations of small Christmas-themed goodies for a Christmas pajama party for foster and kinship children affiliated with FFNYCC and hosted at the store.

The party featured a Christmas carol sing along and reading of "The Night Before Christmas" by Frank and Eadie Revoir, a book reading by Norwich Police Officer Alecia Slack, snacks, goodie bags, and family portraits by local photographer Tim Brown.

"I just want to make it super special for all the kids, because I know sometimes they feel lost in the system. Even though they have good, loving foster homes, still, they feel lost. So I want to make them feel extra loved," said Vidler-Mackey.

"That's what it should be about: giving back."

As a special gift, Vidler-Mackey also gave each child a customized Christmas ornament with their name engraved on it and handmade by local artisan Eric Davis.

Her support of both local and widespread nonprofits is just another way Vidler-Mackey tries to inspire a wave of kindness and generosity in others.

"I think that even just the small actions that I'm taking might cause a wave. Sometimes somebody sees one little thing being done and it makes someone else do something, and encourages them to go forth with their idea on something else for giving back. So let's hope that's what it does," she said. "It's just one small move to make the world better. That's all you can do, and then hope and pray that people follow suit."

### The year ahead

Moving forward, Vidler-Mackey plans to continue hosting free, family-friendly events at Ashby Ann. She'll keep organizing Reading Circle Time and Sing Along events, as well as continue to support Fostering Futures.

With the establishment of Aunt Mary's House, an organization under the umbrella of Improve Norwich Now that will provide safe housing and support for pregnant and parenting mothers, Vidler-Mackey hopes to get involved with the group and



Throughout 2022, Ashby Ann hosted regular Reading Circle Time events, where community members would read their favorite childhood books to local kids. Pictured is City of Norwich Mayor Brian Doliver reading to attending children at the very first Ashby Ann Circle Time. (Photo by Sarah Genter)

find ways to support them as well.

As for Adopt a Soldier, Vidler-Mackey has already started gathering donations for this year's collection.

"We're going to be doing Operation Adopt a Soldier again, so collections are any time now. So I have bins in the back, and every week I add a little bit here and there," she said. "Our donations here were over \$5,000 that we gathered here, in just that short amount of time. But if we start today and go, it'll probably be 20,000 [dollars], and that would be maybe 100,000 more packages that we could have for these soldiers."

Vidler-Mackey also

has big plans in store for Ashby Ann merchandise. She's always been a "crafty" person, and is known for the gnome figurines she makes herself. Now, Vidler-Mackey wants to branch out and create even more things to sell in her store.

"I'm a very artsy person. I do my own gnomes, I paint. I'm very crafty. People know me as this. So why not share my talent with everyone?" she said.

"I want to make things myself," she continued. "I'm going to be starting my own lines. We're starting out with candles and soaps. I'm going to be going into lotions, sugar scrubs. You name it, I'm going to make

it."

She also plans on hand-painting Christmas ornaments to sell this winter, and has even purchased a laser engraving machine to create custom items, such as engraved cutting boards, which she'll be able to complete for customers within a day or so.

"You can pick out your cutting board, tell me exactly what you want on it, boom, done. And I could have it done that day instead of, oh, it's going to be a month," said Vidler-Mackey. "I'm sick of outsourcing people."

Additionally, Vidler-Mackey said she already has embroidery machines, which she'll be using to create things like customized pillows, hand towels, hats, and more.

At the end of 2022, she was getting to work on developing signature scents for her own line of candles, and by the beginning of 2023 had already launched the first round of the Ashby Ann candle line. Scents included Chenango Lake, Farmhand, Morning Punkin, Coventry Fields, and County Fair.

An emphasis will also be placed on natural, organic ingredients for her products, and Vidler-Mackey will be buying her supplies locally whenever possible.

"I will be getting local everything. So local beeswax, local oils, I'm going to be going to our lavender places that we have here locally," she said. "Same thing with the honey and

everything else that I'll need, I'll be getting it from Kutik's. So I would rather keep things local than outsource them now."

Ashby Ann had a jam-packed first year, and it looks like 2023 will be no different. The new year promises the return of popular events and activities, exciting new ventures, and perhaps some more surprises in store from Vidler-Mackey.

Most importantly, though, Vidler-Mackey will continue to use her store as a platform to connect with others and support her community — something she said the community has returned to her as well.

"I've met many goals; I've superseded them," said Vidler-Mackey. "I'm in awe at the love and support from my community. Not even just the holiday season, I mean throughout everything."

"It's not just a store, you know? These As mean something," said Vidler-Mackey, looking at the Ashby Ann sign in the store she named after her grandmothers. "They were strong women, and strong women make strong women to put some ripples in the world, and that's what I'm doing. I'm putting a little ripple. I'm sure those As would be proud. I'm sure they would. And that's all I wanted to do, is make them proud."

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