



# The Sorpresa Gifts

By Bryce Parks

There is a new store in the historic downtown Dubuque. Jonathan and Jennifer McCoy own McCoy Goldsmith and Jeweler, but it now goes well beyond that with The Sorpresa Gifts. Located directly next to the jewelry shop, The Sorpresa Gifts fills a void that Main Street was missing.

The space of 269 Main Street has been vacant for nearly five years since Chocolaterie Stam closed. The McCoy's purchase the building from Jonathan's father, Robert McCoy in early 2022. They expanded McCoy Jewelers with some of the space from the empty storefront - the rest was up to Jennifer's imagination to create what would become The Sorpresa Gifts. "I wanted to create a place that you really can't find anywhere else in town," noted Jennifer McCoy as we sat down in the aforementioned bridal room.

As the space was mostly still in good shape from before, it meant revision the look and feel of the space with paint and maintenance, replacing equipment, and refurbishing the gelato machines. The space quickly transformed into the beautiful, bright space that Jennifer dreamed it would be. "I grew up in retail, my mother owned a Hallmark in town, this space brings back memories of my childhood."

Since Jonathan and Jennifer own a store on lower Main Street, they witness the

desire tourists must shop local during their stay in Dubuque. "We really just wanted to have a gift store because there is such a lack of shopping on Main Street," explained Jennifer. "We see tons of tourist walking up and down Main Street, wanting to shop, they aren't looking for a meal. They're like, 'I want to buy something, where can I go to find spur of the moment items.' We have nice women's boutiques and few niches shopping experiences now, but as far as a gift store, you'd have to shop at multiple different stores on different streets to achieve that. Main Street needed a gift store."

One thing Jonathan and Jennifer noticed people really missed was the Chocolaterie Stam chocolate line. "We immediately booked tickets to go the Fancy Food Show in Las Vegas," said Jennifer. "My number one concern was getting a good chocolate line in. And I tasted every piece of chocolate in Las Vegas, and nothing compared to Stam. We decided it was best to bring back the Chocolaterie Stam to Dubuque."

After, they landed the partnership with Chocolaterie Stam, it was time to find other small boutique lines to fill the large space. "With the exception of one or two, we're mainly featuring products from lines you've likely never heard of before. And over 50% of our designers are female-owned, and you'll find signs on all our lines in our product sections so you can see it's Veteran-owned, minority-owned or female-owned or organic or small-batch. It's important for us to have unique small businesses and not go by what's trending right now."

When it came to what type of products were going to fill the space of Sorpresa, Jennifer leaned on her own passion for cooking, and eating great, unique foods. "It's fun to find things we love and share those

passions with other people," shared Jennifer. "The Pretty Thai sauces are awesome for example, for spicy noodles and stir fries. Runamok is a maple syrup company that makes their syrups in bourbon barrels for a unique tasting experience. They even have a WhistlePig Bourbon maple syrup."

Finding nice little treats for yourself is a big thing for The Sorpresa Gifts. "Sorpresa" means "surprise" in Italian and Spanish, and the McCoy loved their travel experiences in Italy and Spain. "And surprise hits the spot here," explain Jennifer. "The store is truly a shop full of surprises. You can find a gift for yourself, coworker, a friend, your partner, everyone," added Samantha Swift, Jennifer's right hand. Jennifer utilized Samantha's retail therapy knowledge to help fill the space with items that she didn't know Dubuque really needed. "We have great soaps and wonderful things for babies and treats for your pet," shared Jennifer. "If you're looking for a gift, we can probably find something for you, especially for hard-to-buy-for people, like men. Let's put together a nice spicy box with Momofuku, for example. We have bitters and cocktail mixes. So many different things that you're not going to find in other places."

The store is spread out with each brand getting its own little focus, or, some like-minded products, like all thing's popcorn grouped together for the themed shopping. It also makes it super easy to envision a gift basket that way. And while they want to be able to help you find that perfect thing you didn't know you wanted, they don't want the store to get so full of products that it's overwhelming. "We've been in those stores and it's too much," explained Jennifer. "We want it to be a relaxing experience and let the lines of products have their space."

If you know you need a gift but just can't decide, they can put together a gift basket for you, or you can pick from their already made-up gift baskets. "We want people to walk in and be able to leave with a gift they are proud and excited to share with the recipient, and then that person also is excited to come into Sorpresa to shop for their gifts too," noted Samantha.

Hunting down unique lines like these requires a lot of gut intuition. Small boutique lines are often not at major trading shows, so Jennifer and Samantha have relayed on each other to bounce line potentials off each other. "A lot of the places we work with won't sell to others in the area if it is already in an area store," said Jennifer. "And if one takes off and becomes mainstream, great, we're thrilled for them, but maybe we'll phase them out and bring in someone else new who deserves to be showcased. Nearly all our designers are not going to be found at Walmart or Target."

Jennifer also knows that having a store full of surprises means being able to have lines that are growing consistently in what they offer their stores to sell. "Some will work out, and some won't," explained Jennifer. "And that's okay," quickly added Samantha. "There are some lines that one of us was unsure of, and they turned out to be way more successful than we could have ever thought," noted Jennifer. "We have a sweatshirt line that Samantha was passionate about bringing into the shop, I was more unsure, but they have turned out to be a great seller and a line that we will continue to grow," explained Jennifer. Another line that has been a huge seller is RAYGUN, from Des Moines, Iowa. RAYGUN is known for Midwest themed puny shirts. "People come into the store and recognize the brand and are very excited that we have brought it to Dubuque," explained Jennifer.

The product line will continue to evolve all the time. Just like with McCoy Goldsmith & Jeweler, they don't buy a designer and get the same pieces over and over and over. "We don't have 20 of a thing at the jewelers," said Jennifer. "We sell something and then get something new in, and I'd like to do the same thing at Sorpresa. If there's a line that's great and continues to evolve, wonderful. But if that line is stagnant, and it's like, 'We've seen this before,' then let's go find something new because I want it to be that 'surprise' all the time. What's that new fun thing that makes people go, 'Ooh, I've never had that before!' That's always going to be our goal and objective, to keep everything fresh."

Speaking of keeping things fresh, we've been talking gifts, but I kind of buried the lead. They offer chocolates from Chocolaterie Stam and fresh homemade gelato!

"The reception for Stam coming back has been great," shared Jennifer. "People remember just how good it is, and the quality is amazing."

The family-run confectioner with 200 years of practice is now making its legendary chocolates in Des Moines. So, a little bit European and a little bit local.

The day before our interview, Sorpresa had a gelato expert come in and help them fine-tune their process. The flavors that were already good are now incredible. "The consistency and the flavors now are so perfect," Jennifer professed. "The sorbettoes are so creamy that you would swear there was milk in them. I swear it's just fruit and sugar and water. Fat free, I promise you. But they're so smooth and creamy that you'd swear I'm lying. He gave us some new flavors but also some great techniques to take our gelato to the next level."

The next challenge is picking gelato flavors. "It varies by region," explained Jennifer. "Classic Italian flavors don't translate well to an American market, like panna cotta. And people always say they're excited about pistachio, but when we put it in, it's never the biggest seller. Tiramisu, crème brûlée, and anything cheesecake are always big hits here and are almost always in our case. We always have chocolate and vanilla and a couple of sorbettoes."

And fear not, Sorpresa will serve gelato year-round and will rotate flavors by season. "Chai did great recently," shared Jennifer. "We'll be going with some pumpkin spice and apple cider, so we'll get into those nice fall flavors, and then for Christmas, we'll get into the white chocolate and peppermint, toasted marshmallow, and Christmas cookie. And light fruit and freshness will come around for spring."

This isn't a sit-and-eat kind of place. You can get Stam chocolates, gelato, or a beverage from the grab-and-go cooler filled

with bottled beverages. But the idea is to pop in for a treat and/or a gift for someone else or yourself and carry on with your day.

The Sorpresa Gifts brought their bright, modern space online at [www.thesorpresagifts.com](http://www.thesorpresagifts.com). You can also now buy online and pick up in store, but they're not shipping. At least not yet. "Chocolate shipping is challenging, especially in the summer," explained Jennifer, "and we don't want to take away from the integrity of the product. And some of the food items are heavy, so the weight makes it hard to do efficiently." So for now, you can just come and get it in person. And aren't gifts you buy in person always a little more special anyway? They will be doing lots of gift boxes for the holidays as well to give people great ideas.

The grand opening open house is Friday, Oct. 21 through Sunday, Oct. 23. During that time, they will be doing a lot of special things like giveaways, including winning gelato for a year! Stam chocolates will be on sale (and they never go on sale!) There will be samples and fun things daily for the open house, so if you don't put this paper down and go right now, make sure you pencil in a pop-in for that weekend. You're going to need a gelato fix by then for sure anyway. ■



**The Sorpresa Gifts**

269 MAIN ST, DUBUQUE, IA  
563-663-2699

[THESORPRESAGIFTS.COM](http://THESORPRESAGIFTS.COM)

**Hours:** Tue–Thu: 11 AM–7 PM;  
Fri–Sat: 11 AM–9 PM;  
Sun: 11 AM–4 PM; Mon: Closed

**SUBMIT YOUR DINING SUGGESTIONS!**

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? PLEASE SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!  
EMAIL: [DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM](mailto:DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM)

**Potosa Spa**

**SWEET PUMPKIN BLISS**  
*spa services*

sweet pumpkin bliss pedicure  
60 minute | \$82

sweet pumpkin bliss massage  
90 minute | \$125

pumpkin enzyme facial  
60 minute | \$109

200 MAIN ST. | DUBUQUE IA. 52001 | P. 563.588.5570 | [POTOSASPA.COM](http://POTOSASPA.COM)