THE BRIGHTLY LIT Baltica Tea Room & Gift Shop has attracted a steady stream of tea lovers and shoppers since opening in Port Washington over the Memorial Day weekend. Above, shop owners Daniel Micha (left) and his wife Urszula Cholewinski presided over the ribbon cutting. At right, Urszula Cholewinska and her mother Daniela invited guests to check samples of loose-leaf tea. Photos by Sam ArendtEastern European flair dominates atmosphere of former jewelry store

It was a very public unveiling when the plywood scaffolding was removed last month from the front of Baltica Tea Room & Gift Shop.
The shop occupies the former Graff Jewelers building at 223 N. Franklin St., Port Washington.

The building and business are owned by Urszula Cholewinska and Dan Micha.

"The construction was going on since January, although some of the work involved renovating the apartments upstairs," Cholewinska said.

"The interior is so much brighter than it used to be, although we did retain a lot of the old features. The only way it would have been better was if we had a view of the lake."

She said many people have stopped at the shop, anxious to see what was being done behind the temporary facade.

"We have had a lot of business. During Memorial Day weekend, it felt like we were understaffed because so many people were stopping to see the shop," Cholewinska said.

"There were even crowds last weekend for Pirate Fest. We attracted some very classy pirates."

The shop draws its inspiration — and name — from the tea-drinking traditions of Eastern Europe, especially Cholewinska's native Poland.

Patrons are encouraged to linger in the shop, where tea is served by the mug (for $2.50) or the 25-ounce pot (for $5.25). Iced teas are also available (for $2.75).

As would be expected, the shop features an impressive variety of loose-leaf teas representing the five major varieties.

The white teas, which are the least-processed form of tea, include organic, Ancient Moonlight, assam, white peony and White Sunshine.

Varieties of oolong tea, which is full-bodied and semi-fermented, include citron, Iron Goddess of Mercy and classic.

The shop's black tea options are the most diverse. The variety is the most full-bodied of the teas, yet contains just 20% of the caffeine of coffee.

The shop's selection includes Ceylon Lumbini Estate, Earl Grey, English Breakfast, chocolate chai, Masala chai and Prairie Passion.

Some fair trade and decaffeinated versions are also offered.

Herbal teas, which are caffeine free and rich in vitamin C, include blueberry rooibos, chamomile medley, Montana Gold, Moroccan mint and ginger tangerine.

Green teas, which are also minimally processed, contain vitamins and antioxidants. They have as little as 5% of the caffeine of coffee.

The selection includes Dragonwell, green tea with mango and jasmine.

An ever-changing variety of decadent desserts are also available. This week's menu includes carrot tort, chocolate raspberry tort and Baltic Sea cheesecake.

Adding to the continental air of the store, hand-crafted gift items from around the world are

available, as well as Polish stoneware.

The shop is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays.