

Balance, passion drive massage therapist

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Longtime Port banker says career prepared her well for new vocation

For more than four decades, Katherine “Kitchie” Allen helped customers bring financial balance into their lives as the head of the trust department at Port Washington State Bank.

Today, promoting balance is still a mission for Allen.

The motto “In balance with nature” is emblazoned on the wall of her newly opened massage studio, Hands With a Healing Touch.

“I am re-inventing myself after parting ways with the bank,” Allen said.



Her cozy studio is located above the Shirley Schanen Gruen Art Studio & Gallery, 301 N. Franklin St.

The transition from finance to massage therapy isn't as much of a stretch as it might first appear, Allen said.

“I always loved helping people when I was at the bank. It was important to me that people knew they could trust me. Now, I get that same kind of feeling from the healing I can bring through

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massage. It has become my passion," she said.

"I feel it is my understanding of the human body, my passion for massage and my desire to nurture that has made me a good massage therapist. It is not work. It is a joy and a gift."

Allen traces her interest in massage to a fateful day 20 years ago last month, when she and her two children were involved in a horrific automobile accident.

The crash left her daughter Kaitlyn Verfuert paralyzed, but also opened Allen's eyes to the healing power of touch.

Kaitlyn eventually became a world-class wheelchair tennis player, and Allen noticed massage therapists helping athletes as she followed her daughter to venues around the globe.

Inspired by the help massage brought, she enrolled at Blue Sky School of Massage, becoming a licensed therapist in 2003. Her specialty was therapeutic medical massage.

"At first, I looked at massage as something to occupy my time when I wasn't at work, but it has grown into something much more," Allen said.

"I don't think the public realizes how much education is involved to become an effective therapist."

After passing the national exam with the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork and obtaining a state license, Allen became a teaching assistant at Blue Sky.

She has also talked with officials from the school about serving as a mentor for a graduate who is interested in gaining work experience at the studio.

For 10 years, she offered massage treatments from her home on Terry Lane in Port Washington. Her clientele started off with family and friends, but steadily grew through referrals.

A lifelong resident of Port Washington, her community connections run deep. Many of the customers she dealt with at Port State Bank have become massage clients.

Even more people know Allen from the 14 years she served as clerk for the Town of Port Washington.

It was a bit of serendipity that led to the downtown studio.

"I stopped at Shirley Gruen's studio for some notecards. When we started chatting about my massage business, she said she had a studio for rent upstairs, if I ever thought about meeting clients outside of my home," Allen said.

"I was torn about what to do because many of my clients really like the space I have created at my house. I debated with myself, then one Sunday morning, sitting on my deck, I decided I

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would never know if the downtown studio would work unless I gave it a try.”

She said the decision to rent space is her personal endorsement of the renaissance Port’s downtown is experiencing.

“I believe there is tremendous opportunity in Port Washington,” Allen said. “I am happy that people are beginning to come back to small downtown businesses, not only for convenience but for better service and building relationships.”

She drew heavily from the local business community to establish her studio. Allen hired graphic artist Barb Olson to create her logo, Adam Braun of Sign Effectz to create her hanging wall sign and Robin’s Interior Inspirations to decorate the studio.

Clients have been trickling in since Allen opened two weeks ago, some coming from surprising places.

“I have had a client come in from the marina. She said they would be on their boat for two months, and has already scheduled a return appointment,” Allen said.

Treatments are available for therapeutic, deep tissue Swedish, geriatric, pregnancy and sports massage, along with neuromuscular and trigger point therapy.

The fee ranges from \$35 for 30 minutes to \$90 for 90 minutes.

Massage sessions are by appointment only, and can be made by calling Allen at 284-0621 or (414) 412-0671.

More information about the studio and her services is available at www.amtamembers.com/handswithahealingtouch.

Image Information: KATHERINE “KITCHIE” ALLEN has opened Hands with a Healing Touch, a new massage studio on the second floor of a downtown building in Port Washington. Allen is a familiar face downtown, having worked for 43 years at Port Washington State Bank.

Photos by Mark Jaeger

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