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### *Paint The Town*

By Brigid Morrissey

You know the expression, “You are what you eat”? Now, I’m not implying that Dawn Spyker eats bugs or human vertebrae, but her art is definitely an extension of who she is— what interests her and what she likes to do. In her experiences as a teacher, a sculptor, and a business owner, she has learned how to convey her passions and values both in her art and her community. When I crossed the threshold into her retail store in downtown Jeffersonville, I was immediately drawn to the works of art that hung on the black walls, rested on the mosaic fireplace, and covered the display windows. The works are a product of forty-eight local artists. Dawn’s pieces, identifiable due to their common theme combining nature and human anatomy, are scattered throughout the store. Everything about the store, from the black and white tiled floor to the ceramic mugs and glass jewelry for sale, encompasses what the name of the store really means. Gadabout— a person who is a perpetual pleasure seeker— was a word that Dawn stumbled upon in a book. But the name of the store isn’t the only thing that was a product of circumstance. On a snowy winter day, Dawn was working at Silica, the first business she founded with her friend, Jennie DiBeneditto, when she gazed out the window and saw a man hanging a “For Rent” sign on the door of a space across the street. Already in talks of expanding their business, Dawn called Jennie, and it didn’t take much convincing before they snagged the real estate.

In the midst of opening Silica and Gadabout, Dawn and Jennie were also making waves in their community. The pair met at the University of Louisville and remained friends throughout their transitions into teaching jobs, Dawn at Jeffersonville High School, and Jennie at the University of Louisville. They eventually helped form a group with other local teachers that provided art sessions for the public. The idea was to have the individuals make small pieces that would be combined to create one large work— you know, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”— that would then be proudly displayed in the heart of their town. It was a huge success. And since I’m using cliches, you could say that it “caught like wildfire.” The Arts Alliance, as the group is named, is comprised of about fifty community members. If you ever decide to stroll through the area, maybe on your way over to the walking bridge, you might see some painted utility boxes, a wind sculpture, or a large-scale photograph displaying the historic downtown.

Because of her work ethic and care for the goings-on in everything she does, and a little bit of “being at the right place at the right time” (yes, another cliché), Dawn’s involvement with this group led to her position as a public art commissioner, and eventually to a full-time position as a public art administrator. She is too modest to admit to the influence she has had in the amount of growth that Jeffersonville has seen due to the art movement, but she knows that it has created a sense of pride for the people comprising this town. It’s a necessity to connect with other artists. The best inspiration comes from that connection. “It has a great vibe of being open and collaborative, and it’s my mission to make it stay that way.” I guess you could say she’s an “all for one and one for all” kind of woman (ok, last one).