

By Henry Bury

THE INTELLIGENCER

There is life again in the downtown landmark Connor House in the heart of The Village of downtown Belleville.

And a new retail business has taken up residence there, as well.

Catherine Kuhn and Paul Kemp, a Toronto couple in their 30s, and their six-year-old daughter, Hannah, have been living upstairs in the Victorian home at 240 Pinnacle St., across from the Belleville Public Library, since they purchased it this past February.

They opened Green Willow Home, Gifts and Curios on the main floor of their home a couple of weeks ago and have already received "an unbelievably wonderful response" from visitors.

"We have people coming in telling us all about the Connor sisters. The sisters were a fixture here and people have a soft spot for them. And they are very excited that there is something different that piques their interest," Kuhn said.

Kemp said he too is overwhelmed by the number of people who have dropped in and wished them luck in their new business that sells everything from teak furniture, lamps, Buddhist artifacts, pillows and curtains to semi-precious stones, mirrors, beads, cards, candles and wind chimes.

"We hope we're a destination for people to come downtown," he said.

They are the first family to actually reside in the historic home over the past decade.

The three-storey Edwardian-style home was built in 1908 for Dr. Emma Connor, one of the first female doctors in Belleville. Her nieces, Dorothy and Grace Connor, lived in the house for many years, until they sold the property Jan. 30, 1995, to Cathie and Bill Findlay, of Stirling. The Findlays operated a health food store in the house — but they didn't live there — until selling it this past February to Kuhn and Kemp.

(Dorothy Connor died a couple of years ago while her sister, Grace, continues to live at the Bridge Street Retirement Residence).

The couple is affiliated with the Third World Artisans Support Net-

work, an organization that deals with imported 'fair trade' goods. They were operating a gift store in Toronto when they saw a real estate notice for the Connor house.

"We've always had aspirations to someday own our own independent retail business, incorporating the principles of the Third World Arti-

sans Support Network ... this beautiful Victorian home in Belleville was very suitable for both our home and business," he said.

They are in the midst of restoring the home and the garden, as well, and agreed it will be an "ongoing project."

Kemp said he's pleased the house is located in downtown Belleville

"because of the potential that the downtown has."

Kuhn echoed those comments, saying both the Belleville Business Improvement Area and the city of Belleville have a good vision for the revitalization of the downtown.

"That's what drew us to Belleville, as well as the beautiful house itself."

She added that downtown businesses have welcomed them with open arms.

"They are very excited that we are here and that we care about the downtown."

She said the family has enjoyed living in the home.

"This house has such a nice feeling, it really does," Kuhn said. "I personally think it was the female doctors who practised here over the years and it really adds a warm feeling to the home from the healing that went on here."

They chose the name 'Green Willow' for several reasons. The colour green is associated with the environment and the Connor house has green trim.

"The willow is just a beautiful tree and is very poetic," she said.

Through their business, the couple is introducing the Quinte-area community to plantation-made teak furniture made on the island of Java. The selection includes buffets, chairs, cabinets, coffee and dining tables.

"It's all unique because it's hand-carved so that there are no two pieces exactly alike," Kuhn said. "By avoiding a middleman, our prices on our goods are very competitive."

Kemp said the "eco-friendly, hand-made" teak furniture contains natural oils which are resistant to moisture and the drying effects of weathering.

He added the furniture and many of their gift and home decor items are also fairly traded.

"The artisans who make our goods are paid a fair price for their work, are guaranteed safe and healthy working environments, and are our equal partners."

The couple prides itself that their retail operation is an alternative to the ordinary.

"If people have a gift to buy, they can come to our store and find something that is truly unique," she said.

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