

Home decor business thrives

Towneley Furnishings opens in newly restored downtown building

Story by Sheila Harris • Photos by Sheila Harris and Kerry Hays

TOWNELEY CASTLE IN COUNTY LANCASHIRE, BURNLEY, ENGLAND, played such a vivid role in Pat Pilant's childhood, that when she and husband, Chuck Pilant, opened a furniture and home décor shop in downtown Cassville, they named their store Towneley Furnishings, after the castle.

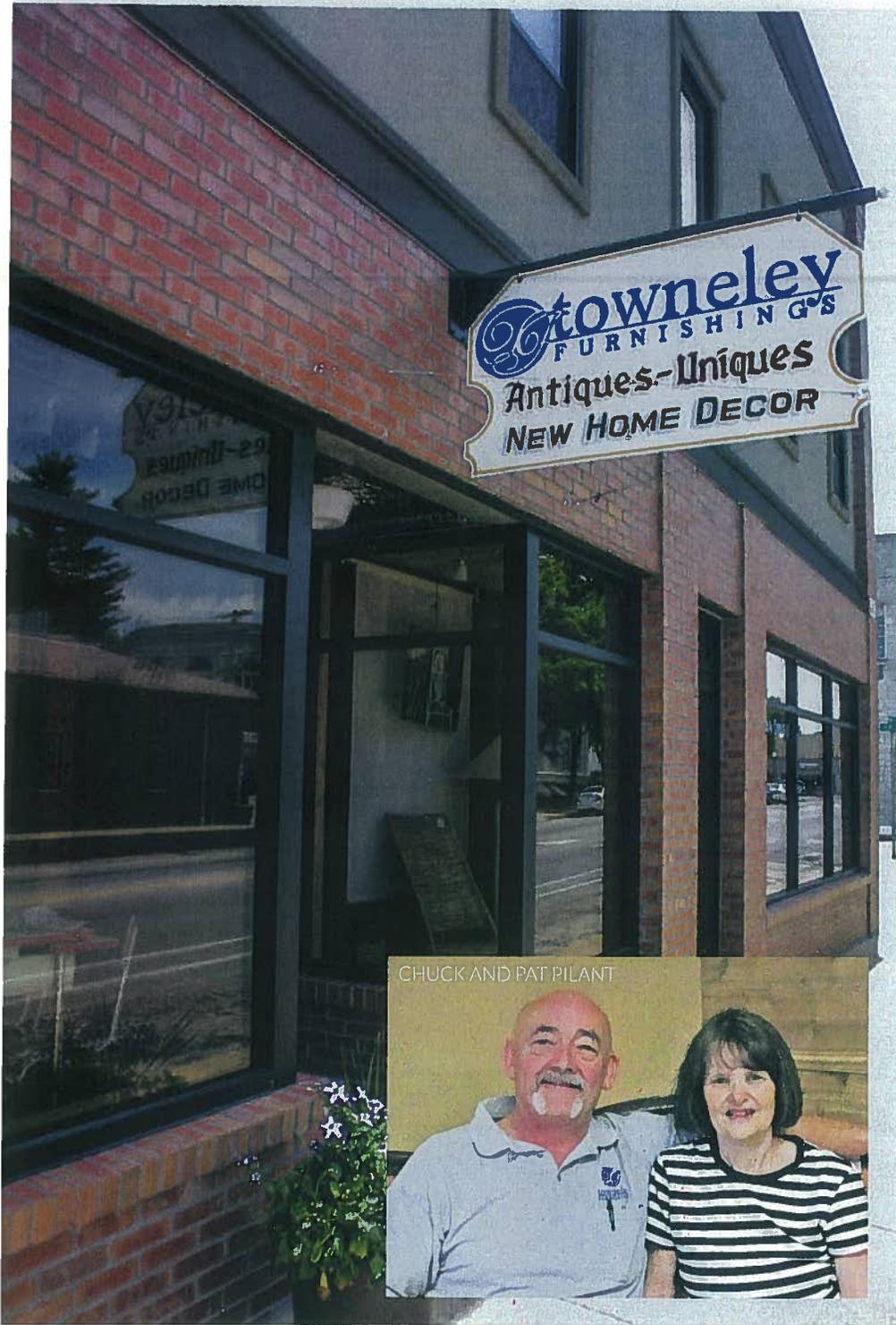
"The castle was open for tours when I was a child," shared Pat, her face lighting up with the memories. "It was wonderfully old and mysterious and filled with beautiful antique furnishings. I loved to visit it, not only for the inside, but for the outside as well. The castle was actually a huge manor house situated on gorgeous, manicured lawns, and we children were allowed to roam and play to our hearts' content. Those were very happy times."

Pat, British by birth, has now spent most of her life in the United States, yet still speaks with the lilting accent associated with the British Isles, and when meeting her, one is immediately drawn to her engaging personality. Pat met Chuck Pilant in Germany some 42 years ago, while visiting her brother who lived there. At the time, both men were stationed there in military service.

"When I met Pat, it was pretty much love at first sight," grinned Chuck, who still remembers their first meeting clearly.

The couple later moved to Chuck's hometown of Prineville, Oregon, where they were married, raised two daughters and expected to remain. That was until, many years later, the couple visited some of Chuck's relatives living in Cassville. Pat was immediately so smitten by the area that she couldn't get it off of her mind.





CHUCK AND PAT PILANT

"It reminded me of England, the part where I grew up," she said. "I felt like Cassville was calling me home."

After Chuck's retirement from the military, the couple did move to Cassville in 2006, where Pat now works from home as a coder for a medical facility. Chuck, however, grew restless with retirement and began looking for ideas for a retail business. Towneley Furnishings, with its mix of new and used furniture (including

some antique pieces), as well as a full line of new and unusual home décor items, was the result.

With its eclectic combination of merchandise, including, but not limited to, unique candle holders, a wide assortment of table runners and napkin rings, colorful Adirondack chairs shaped to fit the body and whimsical table and chair groupings, Towneley Furnishings provides an exciting alternative to big city shopping.

"I like to shop in places I can walk to," said Pat, "and when I can find what I am looking for in my hometown, it makes it all the better."

Among other home décor items to be found at Towneley Furnishings are "Anywhere Fireplaces," small, portable fireplaces available in a variety of styles, which attach to a wall and burn bottled fuel.

"They add a wonderful, warm ambience to a room," said Chuck, "and make a great gift for that person who's hard to buy for."

"Our 25-cent greeting cards are a big hit, too," he added, "and are very easy on the pocketbook."

According to Chuck, sometimes trial and error come into play when making purchasing decisions.

"We carry several varieties of very unusual, large, decorative flowers made of light-weight foam, which have proven to be enormously popular," said Chuck. "When we first purchased them, we didn't order nearly enough to satisfy the demand, which immediately developed. But we are learning as we go."

Some of Pat's favorite things are the gourmet food items they carry that are imported from the British Isles.

"We have British teas, which are much stronger than American," she said. "And Cadbury's chocolate, which is milkier and less waxy than that made in the United States. We also have several different kinds of condiments, including jams, jellies and mustards from Ireland. It's just a way for people in the middle of the United States to get a small taste of life in Great Britain, and it gives me a way to share my heritage with my friends here in Cassville."

The Pilants initially opened their store two blocks south of their current location and remained in business there for about three years. However, through a fortuitous set of circumstances, six months ago, they relocated.

About a year ago, Bob and Carolyn Bishop, owners of State Farm Insurance in Cassville, purchased the two buildings just north of the square on the east side of Main Street as part of the downtown Cassville beautification project. The buildings had formerly housed a dance studio and Williamson's Jewelry. When the Pilants' daughter, Michelle Bredeson, who served

on the Cassville Main Street Association with the Bishops, heard they had plans to renovate the buildings and hoped to find a retail business interested in renting them, she knew her parents would want to be a part of the project.

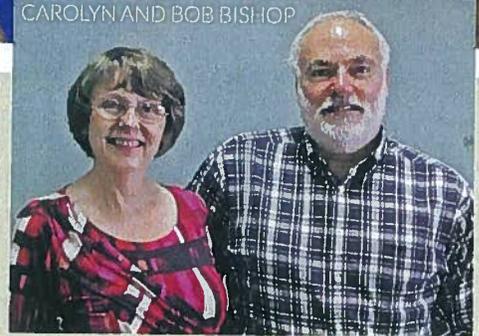
After the Pilants introduced themselves to the Bishops, a rental agreement was confirmed and arrangements were worked out in which the Pilants would renovate the interior of the buildings, while the Bishops would be in charge of upgrading the exterior. As beautiful new red bricks and plate glass windows were being installed on the outside of the building, the Pilants were busy on the inside, ripping out lathe and plaster and giving the building new life by restoring the warm appeal of its original brick walls.

For Pat, part of the charm of Cassville is the architecture of some of its oldest buildings.

"Old buildings are not appreciated as much in the United States as they are in England," said Pat, who is appalled that many people prefer to demolish a structure rather than restore it. "The



CAROLYN AND BOB BISHOP



Downtown DREAMs

By Sheila Harris

Bob and Carolyn Bishop, owners of State Farm Insurance in Cassville, are ardent supporters of the restoration of downtown Cassville.

"When we bought the two buildings where Towneley Furnishings is now located, it was with the idea of renovating them based on drawn renditions for restoration prepared by PGAV planners for a four-block area of downtown Cassville," stated Carolyn.

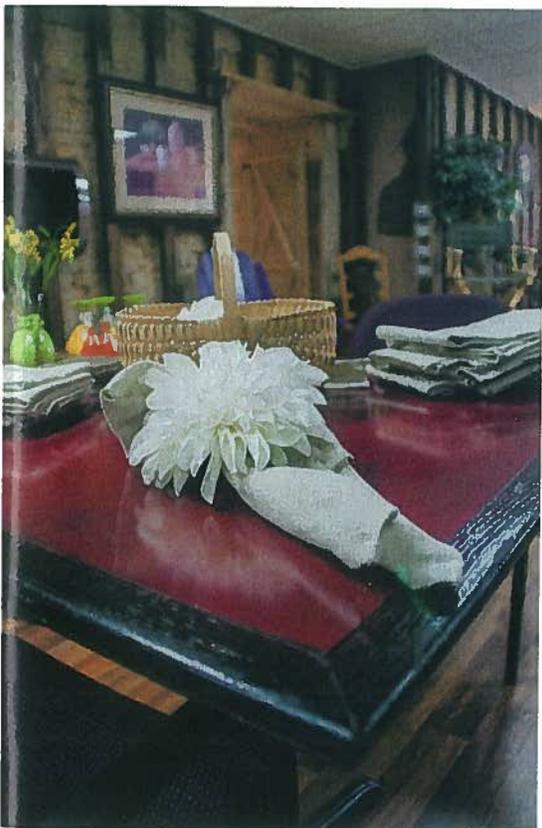
"Using the drawings as a guide, we removed the metal canopies, which had covered the exterior of the buildings for probably the last 60 years and replaced them with new brick, restoring much of the old feel," she continued.

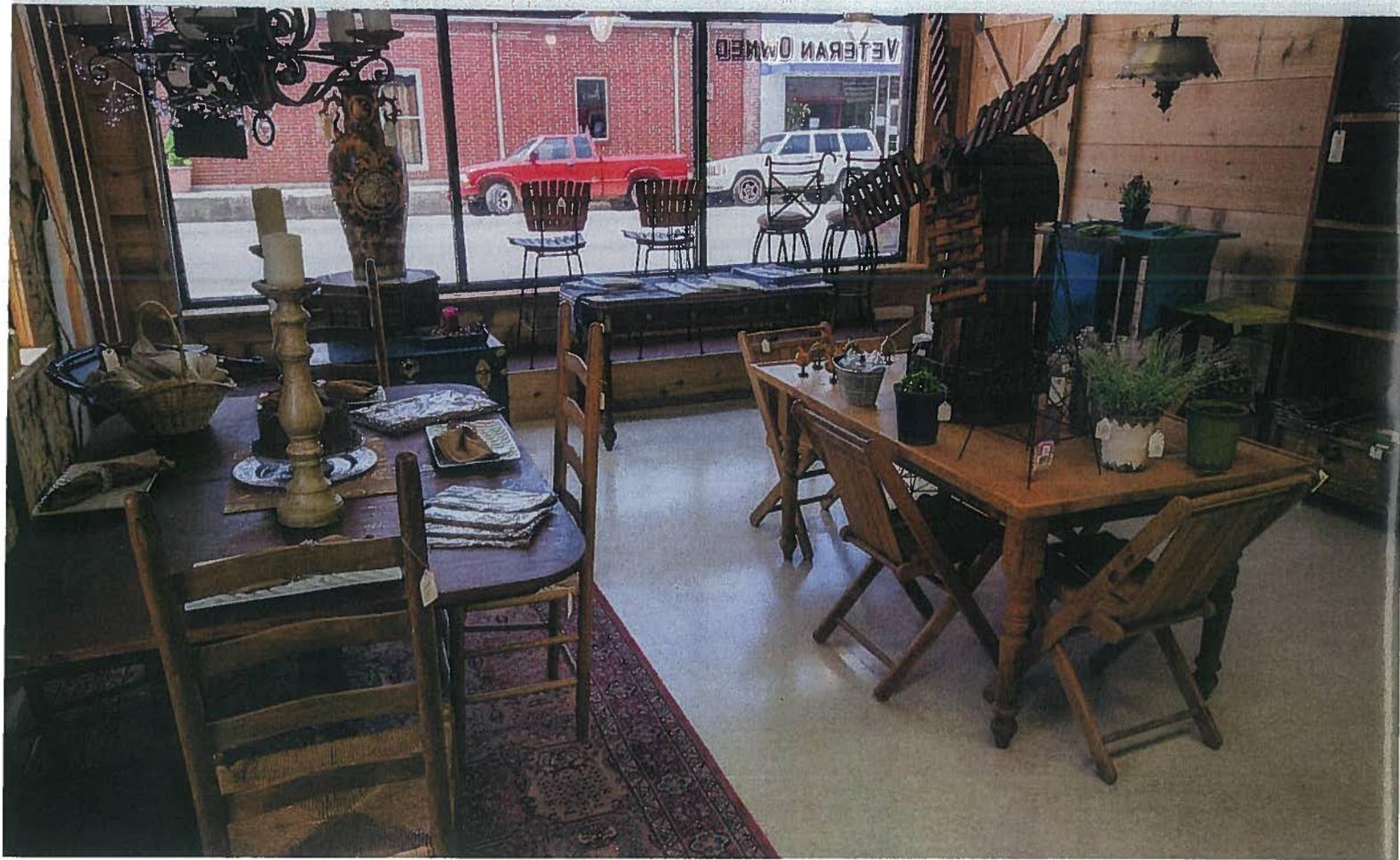
The PGAV renditions for the restoration of downtown Cassville are part of the Cassville DREAM (Downtown Revitalization and Economic Assistance for Missouri) Initiative and will be available for public viewing during an open house hosted by Towneley Furnishings on July 12.

By presenting the drawings to the public, the Bishops and Chuck and Pat Pilant hope to encourage area business owners, and prospective ones, to imagine the very real possibilities for creative growth in downtown Cassville.

Carolyn, who serves as president of the Cassville Main Street Association, is excited about what the DREAM Initiative offers to the city, and her enthusiasm is contagious.

"Our goal is to teach people how to work with local banks to arrange for loans for renovation projects," she said. "And also to let them know that even small changes to their properties can make a huge difference."





downtown areas of cities in the United States have the most amazing old buildings, but many of them are in a terrible state of disrepair. It really makes me happy to see the restoration work that's going on in Cassville."

Chuck, who took his daughter's place on the Cassville Main Street Association, is in complete agreement with his wife.

After finishing the remodeling project, Towneley Furnishings won the Cassville Area Chamber of Commerce's 2012 Business Beautification Award for the renovations done on the interior portion of the building, while the Bishops were recognized as winners for the exterior remodeling.

Chuck says he often has people come into Towneley Furnishings simply because they want to see the restoration work that has been done. Many also ask about future plans for the upstairs of the building.

"The upstairs has been thoroughly gutted and is ready for the next step in remodeling," stated Chuck. "We just haven't quite decided which direction to go with it yet."

With its soaring ceilings and huge



covered balcony overlooking the east side of Cassville, the upper room definitely lends itself to all sorts of interesting possibilities. For the time being, though, it will remain a plan in formation, beckoning tantalizingly in several different directions.

Towneley Furnishings is planning an all-day open house beginning at 10 a.m. on Friday, July 12 at their location at 805 Main Street in Cassville. The event coincides with the Cassville Area Chamber of Commerce's Friday Squared festivities on the downtown square.