



A Day at Stone Soup

By Abigail Kulick, Main Street Manager

Valentine's Day 2005 was a delightful day at 524 North McEwan Street, regardless of the freezing rain and heavy fog clouding the windows to outside. Despite the winter storm, the women at Stone Soup kept high spirits on this romantic holiday.

If I could label Stone Soup and its owner, Carrie Hamming with a single word it would be *STYLE*. Carrie knows style and the products and services offered by her business reflect just that.

Stone Soup Gifts and Home Accessories has been a part of downtown Clare since May 2001. Prior to her arrival on Main Street, Carrie had a similar store named Lavender Lane located downtown Farewell. A new location brought a new title to Carrie's store which resulted from a brainstorming session between Carrie, her young daughter, and Mother Goose. After hours spent reading storybooks to her daughter, Stone Soup, a world renowned fable became the headline of Carrie's new business. With a delectable blend of multiple styles and trends Carrie has created the perfect recipe for Stone Soup.

When I asked Carrie to define her inspiration for Stone Soup she told me *change*. Carrie runs a fast paced retail business; she demands that her store be different every year. Except for a few staple product lines, Carrie rarely reorders merchandise. This method insists that Stone Soup is a distinctive, ever-changing retail shop. Carrie's business is a trend setter and in order to accomplish this feat she must constantly change. Not only does Carrie continue to change her merchandise, she is constantly changing her window displays and every season she even repaints the interior walls of her store. Stone Soup has out of town customers that don't even recognize the interior when they come to visit. They even question whether the store is under new owners or management since

the atmosphere is so different every year. Yet each trip they fall in love with the store more and more and always vow to return.

To prepare for the Christmas Season Carrie completely transforms Stone Soup into a peaceful winter wonderland. Throughout the holiday season Carrie relies only on the relaxing comfort of lamp light to fill her store. The soft glow of lamps provides Carrie's Christmas customers a soothing escape amongst the hustle and bustle of holiday shopping. Although the product lines and colors of the walls change with the season, the underlying theme has never been replaced: *STYLE* is the constant that you will find at Stone Soup.

Carrie has a wonderful staff of four talented women working for her at Stone Soup. Two of her employees are studying interior design while the others have extensive retail experience. Deanna Cotton, store manager and Carrie's right hand woman has spent over twenty years in retail. Deanna plays a large role in the colorful displays that attract downtown shoppers to look in the windows and walk through the door. Since day one Stone Soup has been leading the community in style and home fashion. The women at Stone Soup contribute to this stylish leadership with their design expertise and knowledge of home décor.

Not only does Stone Soup offer products that compliment chic trends and a sophisticated environment, but Carrie's store also offers decorating assistance. The women at Stone Soup know the art of style; they offer House Accounts to customers within a close radius. House Accounts allow customers to have their own personal decorator from Stone Soup come into their home and help them incorporate style into their world. The women at Stone Soup help their customers achieve the culture and class of the store right in their own home! Stone Soup also provides a silk floral arrangement service which is beautifully run by Carrie's mother.

Carrie Hamming is much more than a Clare business owner; she is an active part of the Clare community. Carrie serves on both the Board for the Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Board. Carrie enjoys involving herself in the community and believes it to be a necessary tool for her business as well. Stone Soup participates in city wide events hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, including Christmas Open House and the upcoming Irish Festival. Carrie also hosts an elegant Wine and Cheese Reception in the fall as a special thanks to the customers on her mailing list.

If you are interested in the decorative services or special events offered by Stone Soup please ask about them the next time you stop in to shop. Or check out Stone Soup on line at www.stonesouphome.com.