

# Coming Full Circle

LESSONS LEARNED EARLY ON

HELP LOCAL MERCHANT CONNECT WITH COMMUNITY

By Coral Riley

better than she knew herself. On the day of her graduation he commented on the outfit that she was wearing and suggested that she should pursue a career in fashion. Emily knew she “had a love for fashion from the day she was born,” but as a struggling college student, she didn’t have the money for the fashion items she craved. She started working for a local boutique in Pittsburgh selling their overstock items on eBay, an online auction website. This led to other boutiques in the area having her sell their overstock items and eventually led her to the concept behind her store, Avalilly’s.

When Emily came to Charlotte to visit a friend she fell in love with the weather and also with downtown historic Cornelius; which is marked by its quaint boutiques and locally-owned and -operated stores. Emily launched her online store Avalilly’s, which is named after her niece, Ava, and grandmother, Lilly. Although the online store was successful, she decided she wanted to work face to face with clients — *voilà!* — she purchased a brick-and-mortar store. Emily said her main goal for the boutique is to provide coveted designer fashions at a discount price.

Emily is also co-owner of a Charlotte boutique called Fresh along with her partner, Julie Banchansky. The opportunity to purchase Fresh at Myers Park has created a business model that, to Emily, brings her professional experiences full circle. She has expanded her knowledge of the fashion industry through her work at Fresh. That, in turn, has led to her working directly with the sales representatives from designer labels and previewing upcoming season trends. Most importantly this allows her to create a collection for Avalilly’s that caters to her Lake Norman clientele.

Avalilly’s boutique has several unique offerings. One is that the staff seeks out overstock designer apparel from 100-plus specialty boutiques nationwide to sell them locally in their storefront. At Avalilly’s the items you see in the storefront are the same ones you will recognize from the pages of your favorite magazines or from what you’ve seen in specialty boutiques, and high-end department stores. The staff works directly

with other small boutiques and purchases their excess inventory to create the inventory at Avalilly’s. The merchandise is a mix of current- and past-season items. Emily banked on her experience in Pittsburgh and trained her staff the in fine arts of selling their wares through their eBay store, which has taken this neighborhood boutique to a new level by selling their items online. This offers their customers the opportunity to shop 24 hours a day. By using eBay, Avalilly’s has added to their success because it gives Emily and her staff the opportunity to grow their business by listing items for a worldwide audience to purchase.

If you love to shop and want an excuse for a night out with the girls, Avalilly’s also offers exclusive shopping parties for customers. By hosting a party, not only does the hostess receive a discount, but her guests do as well. Emily and her staff provide cocktails and munchies. Other party themes include wedding showers, birthday parties and charity functions. An added bonus is that Avalilly’s contributes a portion of the proceeds to that charity for which a party is given.

Emily shared that the biggest personal reward from her work is that she has been able to use the values her family instilled in her, along with her savvy networking skills to create a successful business — even though she has no formal business training. She also says that her businesses have provided her the opportunity to support other locally-owned and -operated boutiques. Many of these professional relationships have left the business realm and Emily is happy to call many of these business owners her friends. That has brought Emily full circle again — this time in a more personal way as she said it feels “almost like an extended family.”



“Sometimes you don’t realize what you are supposed to do with your life or what you love until you are doing it,” states Avalilly’s owner Emily Haggart. Emily was raised in Pittsburgh, Penn., and her family owned a local drugstore chain called Rowse Drugs. Her father used to have Emily and her siblings go to local stores to purchase their shoes and other items, instead of going to the mall like the other kids. What she didn’t know at the time was that this practice of supporting locally-owned and -operated businesses was a family value that would extend into her professional life.

Emily originally planned to build upon her degree in Reading Education by getting her doctorate and working as a professor, however, her father seemed to know her

