

For quilters, Escondido store is a little piece of paradise

Owner rejoices in having left corporate world behind

By Cheryl Walker | TODAY'S LOCAL NEWS

Sue Mezera's passions in life have been computers and quilting. Now she's brought the two together in her own business.

After working for more than 25 years in the world of technology, Mezera, 51, tired of the corporate atmosphere and decided to venture out on her own.

Last year she bought Quilter's Paradise on East Valley Parkway in Escondido.

"It was really a big step and it was scary, but it was the best thing I ever did," Mezera said.

Judi Judd of Poway has worked for Mezera since she bought the store.

"Sue was very bold and brave to follow her dream," said Judd, 53. "She took her dream and two great passions and created a big business.

"This is a shop people really want to come to. People who come here are passionate about quilting, and it makes you feel like you're friends with everybody."

The original Quilter's Paradise was a small store of only 1,200 square feet.

"The first thing I needed to do was find a bigger place," Mezera said. "I felt stifled. I couldn't do all the classes

I wanted to do in such a small area."

In December 2006, Quilter's Paradise moved to a 5,000-square-foot building in Escondido. Now there are two classrooms to serve the needs of large or small classes.

"I love the openness of the store and the classrooms," said Anne Neiger of Escondido, a retired interior designer who started quilting two years ago. "There's positive energy all over the store, and they are so helpful."

With more room, Mezera was able to increase her fabric inventory.

"When UPS comes, it's like Christmas Day," Judd

said. "We all gather around and we hyperventilate over it."

The added space has allowed for a sitting area with two comfortable chairs where customers can do handwork on quilts or other projects.

"Her selection of fabric is one of the best," said Neiger, 73. "I love fabrics, and I especially love batiks, and she has a really good selection of those. Things here are well layed out, and the salespeople here are really knowledgeable."

Mezera obtained a degree in computer science from Illinois

Quilter's Paradise

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ABOVE: Sue Mezera unrolls a bolt of batik fabric at her store, Quilter's Paradise. **AT LEFT:** Lois Sonntag (left) cuts fabric for customers Peggy Ancinec (middle) and Arlene Vandevogte.

Charlie Neuman
Union-Tribune
photos



Paradise moved to a larger location about a year ago so there would be enough room to teach quilting classes and space for members to work on their projects. Above, instructor Karen Cunagin teaches a class called "Artful Quilting," one of many classes offered at the store. Charlie Neuman | Union-Tribune

Quilting

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Benedictine in Lisle, Ill. for many years she worked at AT&T Bell Labs in Chicago, where she has obtained a patent.

"Basically it was about the ability to upgrade software on a switching system without losing the existing calls," Mezera said. "People get irate if they can't make a phone call. We were only allowed three minutes of down time a year."

Her computer and technology background has proved beneficial for running a quilting store. Mezera designed motorized curtain-type rods to display quilts, and she keeps all her inventory information stored on a computer.

"By having it computerized, I know what fabric I have in an instant," Mezera said. "It makes ordering more supplies easy. It's surprising, but most shops still do inventory by hand."

Mezera also uses the computer to send e-mails to inform customers of new products and classes. She hopes to soon set up a Web site so customers can order fabric on the Internet.

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Judi Judd,
of Quilter's Paradise

Mezera sewed clothes for her family, and through the encouragement of a friend she began quilting in 1987. What she enjoys most about it is the camaraderie.

"In the corporate world, everyone tends to look out for themselves and they expected more and more," Mezera said. "With quilting, everybody's willing to share and to help."

Mezera also likes to be able to spend time with her customers.

"We support you like a personal shopper," she said.

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