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Squan baby store delivers healthy, organic products

By Dan Zomack

Charlotte West, a new baby store on Main Street in Manasquan, is not your ordinary infant and toddlers clothing and accessories shop.

What makes Charlotte West unique is that the shop exclusively sells products that cater to an organic and healthy lifestyle, or as the shop sign states, it is "a modern, healthy baby store."

The idea for the store began when Elaine and Chris McKeon moved back to New Jersey after living in California for six years.

During their time in California, the McKeons lived a healthy and organic lifestyle, but when they moved back to New Jersey and had their daughter, Charlotte, the young couple found it hard to find businesses that catered to the type of lifestyle the McKeons became accustomed to out west.

With the help of Mrs. McKeon's mother-in-law, Linda McKeon, who owns Center Food Market with her husband, Howard, located across the street, the two decided to open a store to cater to local residents who also live the organic lifestyle.

There was another practical reason to open the store, Elaine said. "Linda had the idea to open the store so we could take Charlotte to the store with us," and they would not need to get a babysitter.

Opening the store was no easy task though. The two women did not have any experience in the baby clothing business, so it was a learning process for both women to select



HOLLY KLEIN, The Coast Star

Elaine McKeon, owner of Charlotte West, a children's boutique shop on Main Street in Manasquan that specializes in catering to a healthy and organic lifestyle, holds her 10-month old baby, Charlotte, for whom the store was named.

products that fit their criteria and that people would want to buy.

"Seven days a week for eight months, we worked on getting the products," Elaine stated.

Even 10-month-old Charlotte, for whom the store was named, went to the business meetings in Philadelphia and New York, Charlotte's mom Elaine said.

"We tried to pick a lot of items that we knew where they came from," Elaine stated. She selected clothes that were made in the U.S., items that are made out of sustainable wool, as well as non-toxic and eco-friendly toys that would help make the store the type of place she would want to shop at for her own

child.

"We had to hunt for it," Elaine admitted about finding the exact type of items she wanted to sell in the store.

There are some items, such as the popular Bugaboo stroller, that the company only sells to stores that have been open a minimum of one year. Elaine and Linda were able to convince the company to allow them to sell the strollers, without having to wait for the one year requirement. The strollers are one of the more popular items at the store as well.

Other items that can be found at Charlotte West include dolls, clothes for boys and girls, furniture, toys, bedding and maternity clothes,

among many other items.

Another popular item at the shop is the Tripp Trapp, which is a high chair that can be converted into a stepping stool. The chair also grows with the child and can change sizes, and even become a chair an adult can sit in. It is a popular item that is also featured at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The store is full of hip and trendy clothing, furniture and accessories for the modern parent and baby, its owners stated. It is the type of store where a parent can "dress the kids like they would dress," as Elaine explained it.

Many of the products sold at the shop are things that Charlotte herself has played with or worn, so when a parent asks Elaine if a baby enjoys a particular item, she can confidently answer yes.

Charlotte even has her own chair next to the checkout counter, and is usually there greeting customers or displaying her shy smile.

Elaine said fall styles will be in stock soon, so if anyone would like to stop in and say hello, or pick up something that is not only fun, but healthy, for their child, they should stop by.

The store is located at 100 Main Street in Manasquan in the new shops located in the Timm's building, and is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

For more information, call the store at 732-223-9400.