

# Made in Michigan, sold in Howell with a local flair

*By George Moses*

This past month Michigan celebrated its 175th anniversary as a state. What better time to have a new store open in our community to celebrate Michigan-made products?

For decades 203 W. Grand River in downtown Howell was the location of Heller's Flower Shop, which closed its doors about 3 years ago. Realtor Karen Wing listed the building for sale. "I couldn't sell it," said Wing. "We had deals fall through, etc. So after 2 years, my husband John and I decided to buy the building. We actually got the building before we decided what to do with it."

"We took a leap of faith and said 'This is right.' We just felt it. We just knew we wanted to do something downtown. We thought, 'Let's do something to help the local economy.' Being in real estate, I knew how bad the economy was at that time. And then we came up with the idea of local artisans. Let's get local artisans involved."

"So we came up with Michigan made products. And, with a local flair. The local artisans are providing a lot of the products. We started remodeling the building. We put a sign in the window 'Seeking Local Artisans.' We got a really good response."

At that time they had decided to name the store "Heart of Michigan" and feature Michigan made products with a local flair.

"The idea was to help the local economy," says Wing. "Now, how I know that's working is a lot of my local artisans told us after Christmas that having their products in our store really made their Christmas this year. It made a difference in some local people's lives. The majority of our artisans are from Livingston County."



**Pasties made locally, fresh daily!**

Among the many treats available, the Wings sell the delicious milk chocolate Yooper candy bar, made in Escanaba in the U.P. The Wings have a local man from the U.P. who makes their pasties fresh for them daily. They will heat them up for you if you want.

"We have what we call our Michigan Lunch to Go for \$5.95," says Wing. "That is really unique. What comes in a Michigan Lunch-to-Go is a pasty, Better Made Potato Chips and either a Faygo or Towne Club pop. Better Made, Faygo and Towne Club pop are all made in Detroit."

"You can also buy the pasty itself for \$4.50 each. And I have people buy 'em by the dozen. They can be frozen. We sell them fresh. But people can freeze them if they want. It's amazing to me how many people we have from the U.P. in Brighton and Howell. A lot of people! And they buy these pasties. I mean they're Yooper approved, let me put it that way!"

Wing posts on Facebook everyday with a featured product. "In March I'm doing the Artisan of the Day where I'm featuring an artisan each day. In April we'll do a Tasting of the Day with free tasting of a Michigan food product each day."



**Proprietor Karen Wing shows off a T-Shirt designed and printed in Howell.**



**Heart of Michigan in the Heart of Howell**

## **A BIG VARIETY OF EVERYTHING MICHIGAN**

"We have a big variety of everything Michigan. We have books, jewelry, photographs art, paintings. We have soaps and bath products made locally. We have Petoskey stone jewelry and wine glasses, and candle holders made out of Petoskey stones."

"Also we have a new product that just came in that I think is so cool. It's called the Yooper wine glass and it's made out of a Mason jar. And that's made right here in Howell. And we have all the food products from all over the state. We have Cherry Republic products from Traverse City. We have a lot of cherry products here."

"We have a great line of soups. They're the packaged soups that you add water to. We have Sanders Candy [Detroit]. Velvet Peanut Butter [Livonia], Jiffy Mix [Chelsea], McClure's Pickles, Germack Nuts, the seasonings and bloody Mary mix from Hell by Smitty's Seasonings. We have Ashby's hand dipped ice cream from Ludington."

"We have our own brand of coffee too. The Heart of Michigan brand. Sanders candy. Miner's Brew root beer from the Webberville Brewery." They don't carry alcoholic beverages but are thinking about adding Michigan beers. They won't carry wine because there's a winery right next door.

Heart of Michigan opened in June, 2011. December was their biggest month last year. The large downtown events help drive business, according to Wing. The Fantasy of Lights parade, Howell's Melonfest, the Pink Party, the big Halloween party are all examples of annual attractions that bring shoppers into downtown Howell.

"As word spreads," says Wing, "I think people are conscious too about shopping locally. My goal in 2012 is to sell more online. We do have a website. [www.heartofmich.com](http://www.heartofmich.com). We are adding products to our site daily. We ship all over the country."

"We do gift baskets. I'd say we made over 200 gift baskets in December. A lot of people have family members that have moved out of state and they want to send them a Michigan gift package. We do a lot with gift baskets. They can call and place an order and we'll ship it out or they can use our website. We do customized gift baskets. Whatever they want in them. That is a big part of our business."

Heart of Michigan is a family owned and operated business. Karen and her husband, John with their daughters Katie and Emily, John's sister, Denise and Karen's sister, Marilyn are the faces you'll usually see when you visit their store.

This is a business that doesn't have to worry about competition from foreign products because its mission is to be an unabashed advocate of Michigan products.

"The T-shirts we sell are all USA made. And then we get them designed and printed in Howell. I'll pay an extra dollar or two to have a USA made shirt printed and designed in Howell, and so will the people. We're supporting our own! And actually we're pretty competitive. People are surprised at our prices. We try to keep our prices down. I think we're pretty competitive with the marketplace."

"I would say, for the first year in business it's been a success. For the first year in business I couldn't ask for better community support. The support from the city. The people. It's been great! And I think it's because of the concept, too. We've had a lot of support."



**Made by Howell bees!**

**Heart of Michigan is Located at 203 W. Grand River in Downtown Howell  
Phone: 517-548-5454 • [www.heartofmich.com](http://www.heartofmich.com)**