

Sentry owner's other business: making Mardi Gras masks

[Miranda Klein](#), mklein@thetowntalk.com Published 11:04 a.m. CT Jan. 14, 2016 | Updated 5:00 p.m. CT Jan. 15, 2016



(Photo: Miranda Klein/The Town Talk)

Vicki Allen, owner of Sentry Drug & Grill in downtown Alexandria, picked up a hobby a couple years ago: making Mardi Gras masks.

Much to her surprise, it would become a second year-round business for her.

If you're attending a local krewe ball this year, chances are there will be more than one lady sporting a Magnolia Mask, handcrafted by Allen. She sells hundreds each year now at Sentry and at Sassy Girl, a boutique in Alexandria.

"I always do a double take when I'm looking at people's Mardi Gras pictures, and I'm like 'Oh, that's mine,'"

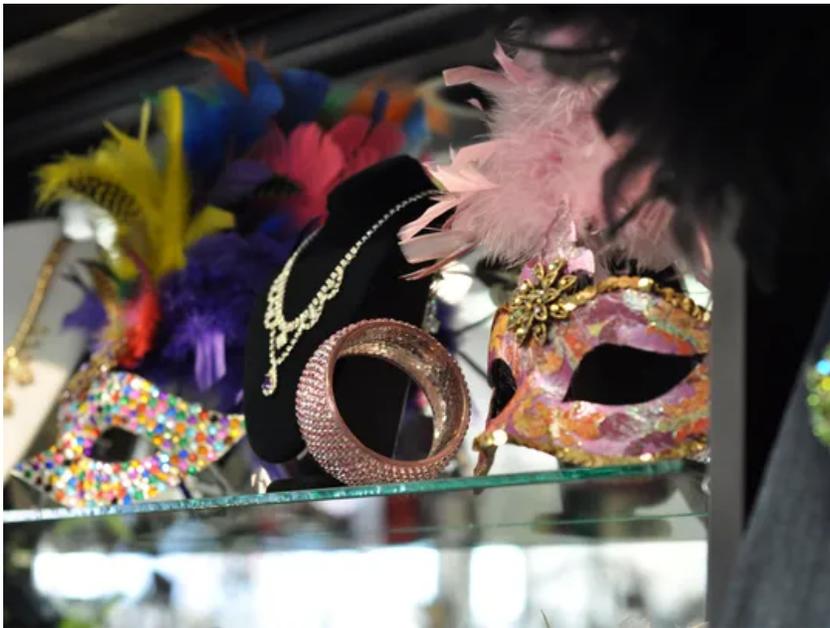
Allen said.

There aren't a lot of other places selling the masks locally, Allen says, which is part of the reason she started making them for her own fellow krewe members.

"We were always having problems finding them," Allen said.

Which is probably the reason that once word got out, orders started pouring in.

"It keeps me very busy," Allen said. "It started out as a hobby, and it's turned into a business."



Vicki Allen's handcrafted masks are available at Sassy Girl in Alexandria as well as her own business downtown, Sentry Drug & Grill. (Photo: Miranda Klein/The Town Talk)

Allen starts with a blank slate: a white papier-mache mask. She reshapes and then decoupages them. Also, the masks are attached to plastic glasses, so they are more comfortable than ones that are tied with ribbon, Allen said.

Jewels and feathers are the finishing touch. Feathers also are a testament to how much Allen enjoys her craft.

"I'm allergic to feathers," Allen laughed, pointing to her watery eyes.

But, she's not about to give up her fun because of that. Her system is to make the masks year-round. And she waits to glue on the feathers just before they're sold during Mardi Gras, so her eyes aren't bothered for the rest of the year.

"It's so fun I wouldn't give it up," Allen said.

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Still, couldn't some one else glue on the feathers?

"Oh, no," Allen said. "I'm too Type A and picky."

Maybe also why her custom masks are catching the public's eye. Whatever the reason, Allen is happy to keep growing Magnolia Masks each year. She is always eyeing popular styles and colors to coordinate her designs with. She also is always on the hunt for new ideas and welcomes requests from customers.

"Everyone wants a different mask every year," Allen said. " ... I try to keep them as different as I possibly can."

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