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BUSINESS

Sue McGarvie's lingerie store abruptly closes doors

BY ANDREW MAYEDA

The Love and Romance store on Rideau Street, the retail brainchild of radio personality Sue McGarvie, has closed.

Neighbouring shopkeepers say the store was cleared out in the middle of the night on Sunday. By Monday morning, the store, below the Mexicali Rosa's restaurant at the corner of Rideau and Waller Streets, was stripped virtually bare.

"One day they were here and the next day they were gone," said Terry Makay, manager of the Record Runner, a few doors down. "They were open on Saturday, and as far as in know, they were open on Sunday."

The store, which sold everything from lingerie to erotic oils and sex gadgets, opened in September 2003. At the time, Ms. McGarvie said it would be a "Body Shop with toys" that would appeal to mainstream consumers.

Ms. McGarvie is probably best known to people in Ottawa as the host of the radio show *Sunday Night Sex with Sue*, which aired on The Bear in the 1990s.

Last year, the company expanded to six stores in Ottawa through licensing and partnership deals, but Ms. McGarvie has severed ties with the other stores, according to the owners.

In an interview, Ms. McGarvie insisted that the Rideau store was "still open" and had just "moved some stuff out."

She hinted at a disagreement with landlord Claridge Homes, which owns the plaza in which the store is located. She said the store invested $100,000 in leasehold improvements in the property, which is slated for demolition early next year. Claridge plans a condominium development at the site.

But she refused to elaborate, noting repeatedly that "my lawyer's got it."

Claridge vice president Neil Maholtra declined to comment in depth, saying he didn't want to engage in "mud slinging." But he said the store entered into the lease with the previous landlord, not Claridge. And he said that Claridge acted within the owner's rights of the original lease.

"We aren't doing anything that doesn't appear in demolition clauses in that lease," said Mr. Maholtra. "When she decided to put in all those improvements, those were all made as part of the agreement she had with the previous landlord."

Ms. McGarvie said the store has paid its rent for the current month, but Mr. Maholtra declined to say if there was any rent owing.

IKEA: Plans continue

Continued from PAGE E1

Ms. Mutter said the planning continues. The decision to postpone expansion probably does not mean that IKEA is considering a second store in the Ottawa region, possibly in Gatineau.

Ms. Mutter said IKEA typically builds a new store to capture customers within a 45-minute drive. However, IKEA does plan to change unilingual signage in the store to make it more accessible to francophones.

The retail plan, meanwhile, cuts prices of high-volume products by an average of 17 per cent. The retailer is also distributing 360,000 catalogues — 25 per cent more than it did a year ago — to advertise the new prices. Combined with recent radio commercials delivered in a Swedish accent that probably makes Daniel Alfredsson cringe, that could boost store traffic, particularly in the busiest annual period at the end of August.

Ms. Mutter said the Ottawa store attracts two million customers annually. The loyal customers make an average of 6.5 trips annually.

In the fiscal year that ends in August, she said, sales will rise about six per cent to more than $70 million.

To ease the crunch at the Pinecrest store, Ms. Mutter said, most back-store space has been converted to sales space and storage moved to a warehouse on nearby Morrison Drive. There will be three new cash registers and employees will have electronic devices to speed transactions when lines are long.

IKEA said it cut prices on high-volume "icon" items to build consumer loyalty in the intensely competitive market. IKEA said the price cuts represent five per cent of annual sales. IKEA's Canadian stores have annual sales of $1 billion.

Retail analyst Len Kubas she he was surprised at the IKEA strategy because it is generally considered to be low-priced already. But according to analyst John Winter of John Winter Associates, the move illustrates the competition in home furnishings. Stores such as Sears, Leon's and the Brick, he said "have big warehouses and have very sharp prices and compete very strongly with IKEA."

"IKEA is somewhat different from these other stores. It has its own way of doing things, but all four of those big companies are all competing against each other," Mr. Winter said.

The timing of the price reduction is surprising, he added, because the housing market is booming. "It is not driven by a lack of demand. Therefore, it must be driven by a desire to obtain a higher market share vis-à-vis their competitors, and they've got strong competitors," he said.

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BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

IKEA store manager Joanne Mutter says plans are still being discussed to expand the busy Pinecrest location.

Cookie: Rolled oats and butter

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The connection, says Ms. Waring, was the beginning of a partnership with the 35-year-old mother of two and rapid expansion of the business. At first, Ms. Suter, a nurse in her native Switzerland, would arrive at the bakery with her pre-schoolers each afternoon.

"The kids entertained themselves while we cooked," recalls Ms. Waring. "They deserved a medal for their patience. That's how we started, but we knew that we couldn't work that way for ever."

Ms. Waring took out a $40,000 mortgage on her home to finance the move to a 1,000-square-foot building in Alfred that had once been a catering facility. She gave the business, which was incorporated in 2001, a "really professional look" by buying and labelling customized packing cases and arranging for a product bar code, and purchasing additional racks and pans so that the partners could meet the demand for more cookies.

Ms. Waring approached 10 friends to raise the next $40,000 she needed. "It was a big investment, but they were the kind of friends who wouldn't have had a heart attack if we had gone under."

Ms. Suter said this seemed unlikely, given the growing customer base. "The real change came with the bar code and the packing cases. That's when we really jumped to the next stage. Whole Foods liked the product and that meant we were into the U.S.," she says.

Aunt Lizzie's cookies are available in such Canadian chains as Loeb, Sobeys and Costco, and numerous independent stores. Talks are in progress with other chains.

The company had to conquer two problems after securing Whole Foods' backing. The group required a recipe change to ensure that only butter (rather than some vegetable oil) was in the cookies.

Until recently, Ms. Waring, Ms. Suter and their staff were making all the cookies by hand. Now a machine, invented by an engineer friend of the Suters, "still leaves the cookies looking homemade," says Ms. Waring. After again taking out a $40,000 mortgage on her home to purchase the equipment, "we can produce up to 30,000 boxes a month."

The primary ingredient of the cookies is rolled oats. The cookies are very thin with ridges on top, originally made by a fork but now made by the machine. With queries and orders from as far away as Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Mexico, the next issue is to package the cookies to extend their shelf rom the current one month to six months.

"As soon as we have dealt with the concept of packaging — small packages for airlines too — we will move into international marketing." Ms. Suter says.

Provocative: Dove ad makes women feel good, but not so good they won't buy

Continued from PAGE E1

"Advertising ... has this long-established instructional role," says Ms. Graydon. "We learn from the media how to do our hair, how to put on makeup, how to dress, and now how to undress."

According to Jennifer L. Pozner, executive director of the advocacy group Women In Media & News, the campaigns give women a false sense of empowerment by equating sexuality with self-esteem. "There's something to be said for a woman feeling confident in her own skin," she says. "But when you detach that from any other concept of empowerment in her life, the women's movement becomes reduced to who can wear the reddest lipstick and the shortest miniskirt."

Dove's take on the trend is the most appealing to the media watchdog since it features ordinary women. The company's latest block of television ads, *Undressing for Dove*, features females of all shapes and sizes frolicking in their underwear to assert their self-worth — and to promote Dove's cellulite-firming body lotion.

"At least they're trying to take a different approach," says Ms. Pozner. "However, the hidden agenda with Dove is to make women feel just good enough about themselves that this campaign stands out, but not so good about themselves that they don't need their products."

Erin Iles, Canadian marketing manager for Dove, says half-naked women were used in the ads to literally strip down stereotypes about real beauty. By co-opting a tactic used in beer commercials and applying it to a feminist appeal for real beauty, the power is returned to women.

"We put women in their underwear because they love their bodies so much and we really want to show off this incredible diversity of body shape," says Ms. Iles. "Women's bodies aren't all about selling sex."

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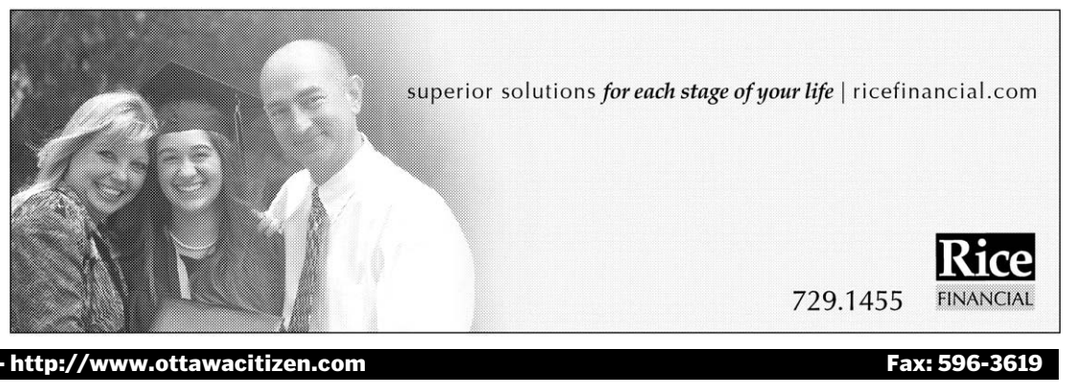

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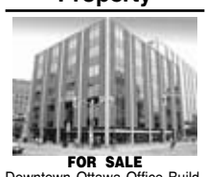

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