

# Don't get malled

Explore the unique, independent shops of Takoma Park Silver Spring, and Kensington

BY LYDIA POLIMENI

Growing up in rural West Virginia, one of my favorite parts of the holiday season was to wander through the historic section of the nearest town with my big brother, looking for unique gifts from the local shops. We preferred the peaceful atmosphere and the colorful stores to the crush of the nearby shopping mall. As a recent transplant to Maryland, I'm hoping to continue the tradition of finding special presents in special places.

## Silver Spring

On a blustery Black Friday I set out to see what I could find in downtown Silver Spring. The revitalization of the downtown area has brought with it many chain stores, but sprinkled among them are some great locally owned businesses.

Living Ruff on Georgia Ave has entertaining, quality products for pet lovers and pets alike. Spoil your pup with treats from the bakery or buy him a bottle of J. Barker Black Label Canine "Spirits" to ring in the new year. Interactive games to play with one's pet, animal themed ornaments, picture frames, and earrings (even kitty aprons!) would all make fun gifts for pet owners. Living Ruff gives back to the community through animal rescue and local advocacy groups; as an animal lover I'm happy to know my purchase will help support our furry friends in need this winter.

Just next door to the pet shop I find the Pyramid Atlantic Arts Center. This bright and airy space is filled to the brim with



PHOTO BY LYDIA POLIMENI

Whichever winter holiday you celebrate with your furry friends, Living Ruff (on Georgia Avenue) is happy to accommodate.

locally produced arts including jewelry, ceramics, printed T-shirts, totes and of course, framed works of art. Currently there is also a variety of handmade Christmas ornaments, which always make lovely gifts.

A few blocks east in the Whole Foods

shopping plaza (free parking!) are some more great places. Metamorphosis Wardrobe & Accessories Boutique blooms with delicate silk scarves, colorful hats, soft shawls and blouses, and chunky yet elegant jewelry. Gift cards are available as well. Next door to the boutique is Adega Wine Cellars which has a wide variety of wines, with helpful explanations, great prices, gift bags, and T-shirts printed with such phrases as "Rich & Deep with Exceptional Character." There is also a busy café located inside, the scent from which leaves my mouth watering.

Next I decide to venture southwards to check out Fenton Village. What was once the main shopping district is now decidedly quiet, especially on the busiest shopping day of the year. However, I found at least one interesting shop on every street and inviting places to warm up along the way, such as Highland Origin Coffee and Kefa Café.

My first discovery, after a short walk south on Fenton St., is Alliance Comics. I know immediately this will be a perfect place to find gifts for my "geek" brothers. Racks of comic books and graphic novels in a wide variety of genres are surrounded by displays of posters, collectible action figures, shirts and other accessories (my

favorite being the wallet fashioned after the old Nintendo controller). Check out the "bargain basement" for tons of clearance items.

Next door is Siembra, a small shop worth a stop-in to peruse their selection of new and used interiors, jewelry and art.

Not far away on Bonifant St. is the tiny Pennyworth Shop. I was pleased to discover this volunteer-run thrift store, which has been around for fifty years. Many people might not consider gift buying at a secondhand store, but in what promises to be another tight season for shoppers, this is a great example of a place where one can find affordable and unique items. During my visit I spotted a lovely gold-sequined jewelry box from India, vintage bookends, and two Trivial Pursuit Games (Baby Boomer and the All Star Sports editions) intact and in great condition. I also noted a variety of sturdy and picturesque baskets that could easily be transformed into traditional gifts with some oranges, candy and ribbon.

Next door to the Pennyworth Shop is Magical Oils Herbs & Incense. If there is someone on your list who is into smelly stuff, be sure to stop by this place – it has



PHOTO BY LYDIA POLIMENI

Got a comic nerd on your list? Check out Alliance Comics on Fenton Street.

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# Celebrate local \* Holiday Gift Guide



Wild things lurk in Now and Then.

PHOTOS BY ERIC BOND

colored pencils. I spent hours, years actually, drawing and coloring on my table. Speaking from experience, I know that quality supplies are a great way to encourage anyone developing their artistic side, and this store is full of them.

Also on Georgia Avenue is Dale Music, a retail music shop which has been in operation since 1950 and offers private lessons – a possible gift idea for the young (or not so young!) music lover. Speaking of music, a few blocks south from Dale Music is Roadhouse Oldies, located on Silver Spring Avenue. Run by professional oldies DJs, this store has a huge selection of soul, doo wop, jazz, and hard to find “oldies” tunes from the ‘50’s through the ‘80’s. They also offer the option to create your own cd compilations in-store. Mix tapes are a nostalgic pleasure of mine and so this stands out as a definite fun and meaningful gift possibility.

## Takoma Park

A few days after my Friday poking around in Silver Spring, I take a short drive over to Takoma Park and discover a lovely, pedestrian-friendly shopping area. Carroll Avenue in the historic district is lined with picturesque gift and specialty shops like S & A Beads, where patrons can create their own jewelry on the spot with beads from as far away as Africa and Asia, and Now & Then which has a wonderful section of yarns, needles and books for the knitting enthusiast—plus homewares, jewelry, and a whimsical children’s area.

The Magic Carpet almost overwhelms me with its kaleidoscopic variety of wall arts, jewelry, lamps, glassware, pillows, polished stones, candles, jewelry boxes, scarves, and much more. The owner, who

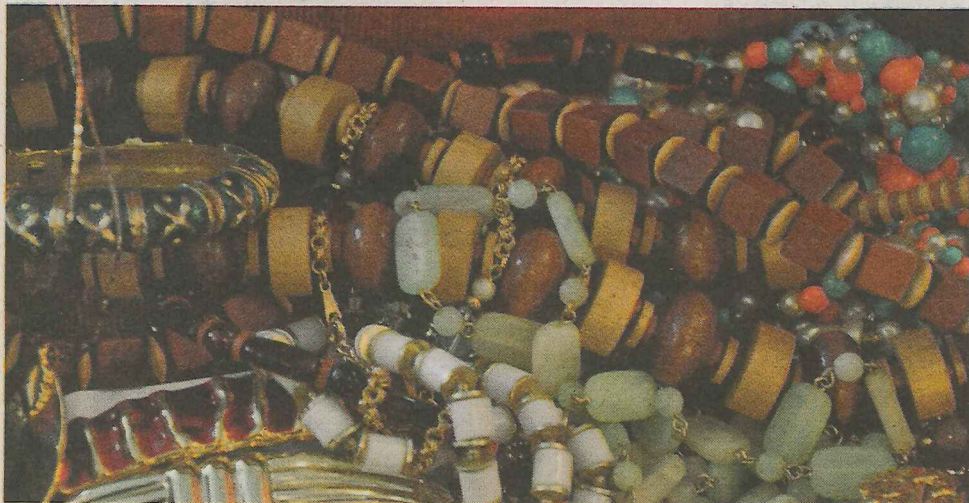
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## Shop local, continued

hundreds of scents.

Across the street is Silver Spring Books, a used bookstore and another place where a few dollars can go a long way towards finding a gem of a gift.

Back up on Georgia Avenue I wander into Plaza Artist Materials, the art store with the big orange cat lazing in the window. Just inside the door is a brand new, white, kid size drawing table. Immediately I am taken back to a memorable Christmas when I received a very similar drawing table and a set of 72 Berol Prismacolor professional



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## Shop local, continued

goes by Deniz, grounds me with a walk through the store and tells me all about her wares, which are purchased from all over the world. This is another positive aspect of small business shopping – the chance to talk directly with store owners who are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their goods and have the time and desire to speak with you.

A little farther up Carroll Avenue is Video-Americain, boasting a huge variety of movies to rent—with a particular focus on foreign films, the Criterion Collection and a great selection of DVDs for sale. This is any easy gift spot – who doesn't love movies?

Next I spot ReRun, which sells a mixture of vintage and modern clothing,

old records from John Lennon to Kiss, and you might just nab an antique video camera for the collector.

When strolling down Carroll, be careful not to miss the stores on adjoining Westmoreland Avenue. The Tranquil Soul, with its fragrant and calming atmosphere, is a nice place to find fair trade, organic stocking stuffers such as lotions, soaps, and essential oils. Himalayan salt lamps are unique and thoughtful gifts.

A few doors down sits The House of Musical Traditions, which boasts a beautiful variety of handmade instruments, from drums made in Ghana to sitars and hammer dulcimers.

Also on Westmoreland is The Still Point, where one could purchase a massage or facial for a stressed friend or parent, or maybe just a few of their special aromatherapy body patches or loose leaf



PHOTO BY ERIC BOND

teas.

Back up on Carroll Avenue I spy Fair Day's Play, a store chock full of interesting puzzles, books and games for kids, all of which are fair trade and/or union made.

The Covered Market also catches my eye with its sparkling variety of beaded and glass-mosaic lamps from Turkey, gorgeous gifts for someone with a new home to decorate. Next door is Moonshadow, where one can find adorable vintage hankies, gloves, buttons, hats,

jewelry boxes and quite a lot more.

After my two days of exploring I'm pleased to know it won't be difficult to continue my tradition of shopping for one of a kind gifts from interesting local shops. Now that I'm older I'm also aware that I'm not only giving something unique to a loved one, but giving my support to small business owners, many of which in turn give back to the community. And we all know the holiday season is about giving.

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