

Cameo Dress Boutique debuts in Piazza Carmel



Dresses for any social occasion line the racks at Cameo Dress Boutique in Piazza Carmel. (Courtesy)

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- Carmel Valley

With her newly opened Cameo Dress Boutique, [Carmel Valley](#) resident Rachel Justice-Crowder wants to make sure that every woman feels confident and looks their best in what they are wearing at every social occasion. The new concept store in Carmel Valley's Piazza Carmel offers dresses and gowns for all social and special occasions for children, teens and women, anything from first communion and flower girl dresses to prom, wedding dresses and mother of the bride looks.



Cameo Dress Boutique owner Rachel Justice-Crowder and her husband Andy.

“We’ve been really busy,” said Justice-Crowder of the boutique that celebrated its grand opening on July 19. “We’ve done some good business, even with plastic still on the windows.”

Once the plastic came down and window decals and displays went up, she said women came in to check out her fun and stylish hat selection for Opening Day at the Del Mar Racetrack and ending up leaving with a whole new ensemble. Cameo had its official opening day the same day as the racetrack last week and right at 10 a.m. there were ladies in line ready to come in. The first 50 shoppers received a swag bag and later in the evening, Justice-Crowder, staff and guests toasted the new store with champagne.

In addition to dresses, Cameo offers a full look from head to toe with jewelry, handbags, hair accessories and shoes. For those not in the mood for a dress, the boutique also carries dressy separates — such as a full line of Frank Lyman Basics tops, jackets, pants and ponchos.

A San Diego native, Justice-Crowder recently moved back a year ago after living in Portland, Maine.

She got into retail seeking a change from her stressful career in the healthcare information technology field where she did sales, marketing and business development. She purchased a boutique called Tavecchia and owned it for a year until her husband was transferred to San Diego.

Once in Carmel Valley, she was focused mainly on getting her daughter settled into kindergarten at Ashley Falls Elementary School, but she still was interested in owning her own business again. She looked at several locations before seeing the store closing sign on the window at Ronda’s Closet in Piazza Carmel shopping center.

After meeting with Ronda Chowaiki, who was closing the store after 13 years, she made multiple calls and, through the luck of the draw, got her chance to

take over the space when another tenant dropped out. Her business plan was all set and she took over on May 1.

Justice-Crowder gave the store a complete cosmetic makeover with new paint, carpet, sparkling chandelier light fixtures and a third, ADA-accessible dressing room. The bright white store allows the colors of the dresses to really pop and be the artwork of the boutique.

“You’ll see a lot of singles. One dress, one color, one size,” Justice-Crowder said, noting a lot of the labels can only be found in small boutiques, cutting down on the chance that you’ll show up to an event with a woman wearing the same number.



Inside the new Cameo in Piazza Carmel.

The jewelry is all “kind to skin,” and each piece has a unique story behind it. She carries Firefly, handmade in Guatemala with Austrian crystals and Czech glass beads that Justice-Crowder can only purchase four times a year, as well as unique collector pieces from Ayala Bar, an Israeli jewelry artist.

The shoes and purses are all Adrianna Pappell, a brand well-known in Macy’s and Nordstrom that makes a separate line to sell to small boutiques like Cameo.

“Everything has to pass a quality test to be in here,” Justice-Crowder said.

Justice-Crowder said her store will also cater to women who fall into the “hate to shop” crowd — she and her staff are all about service and will spend time putting a whole look together for the client. She wants all of her customers to find a dress that most flatters their frame and fits their personality best —she wants everyone to feel confident in what they buy.

“You’ll get a dose of honesty in here,” said Justice-Crowder. “I won’t let you leave here unless you love what you have.”

Cameo Dress Boutique is located at 3860 Valley Centre Drive, Carmel Valley in Piazza Carmel, near the Vons. For more information, visit cameodressboutique.com. Cameo Dress Boutique is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.