

Clockwise from top left:

Walden Farms Toffee & Fudge, AllAboutU,
Diggin' It, and Guitar Sanctuary



LYNZEY ALLISON



PHOTO COURTESY ALLABOUTU



By Steven Nester



SANDI DINEHART

Diggin' It

Just a moment – did the magical mystery tour bus just drop me off at Haight-Ashbury? It sure feels like it. Situated in the old Greyhound Bus depot, the arty emporium Diggin' It is many things at once. It's a store, a gallery, an art school, a consignment shop and a Mecca for local artists. "Diggin' It is all about creativity and good vibes," says owner Tracey Collins.

Step in and the mellow music lulls, the incense wafts, and the eclectic selection, almost all made by local artists, harks back to the "Summer of Love". Tie-dyed clothing, candles, aromatic soaps, mobiles, seashells, old signage, funky sheet metal yard art from Mexico, candles, original artwork and jewelry will keep you busy trying to satisfy your inner craving for locally created art.

Funky Junky, one collection of jewelry in Diggin' It, is created with found objects by local artist Sandi Dinehart. Her method reflects her ethos and place of origin. "The whole idea of reclaimed items comes from Oregon," says Dinehart. "Recycling was a given, a natural byproduct of me coming



from there. I'm as excited to see a bunch of rusty washers as I am to see a dozen roses." Her creations are made from keys, vintage hardware, chains, beads, gears, chandelier crystals – you name it.

For the hands-on types spirit looms large at Diggin' It. Local artists are not selfish with their talents, and they pitch in to run classes in painting, organic gardening, and mosaics. And for those who dig the dirt, Collins carries many varieties of unusual plants including herbs, a wide variety of lavenders, patchouli plants, and an organic seed line.

I am so diggin' it, and you will too.

Local Yocal

McKinney, I tell my city slicker friends, sits at the edge of a vast prairie that extends all the way to Canada. The living here is wholesome. The air is fresh and clean. The stars at night are big and bright and locally grown organic food is not too hard to find if you know where to look.

And one should look no further than Local Yocal just off the square. While the location is slightly urban, the organic food is fresh from the farm. "You're going to want the organic grass-fed beef," say proprietors Matt and Heather Hamilton, and they ought to know. They raised the cattle themselves. No chemicals are used in the making of Local Yocal's beef; in fact, almost everything in the store is organic and as local as can be got, from the pickles to the fruit, honey, and olive oil. Even the cotton in the T-shirts they sell is grown down the road a piece. But the cattle the Hamiltons raise are the stars.

In addition to raising Angus cattle on their ranch in Durant, Oklahoma, the Hamilton's specialty is the Wagyu variety, which is the animal bred in Kobe, Japan, for its legendary Kobe beef. Here in the Lone Star State it can't be called Kobe, but who cares? Tender and full of flavor, the Hamilton's brand can only be found at their Tennessee Street location. If you need a landmark to find the place, just look for the store with the tractor parked out front.

AllAboutU

Remember the 1970s? "The Me Generation"? Times have changed and today it's all about you. There's even a store for it – AllAboutU Spa, Salon, & Boutique. "Our mission," says proprietress Kristen Markiewicz, "is to make you fabulous from head to toe," and the products, services, and expertise available are spot on.

Plush leather chairs in a stylish atmosphere, leisurely shopping in the boutique – may we offer you a glass of wine while you wait? Just don't get too comfy, you might miss your appointment! You won't, though, because AllAboutU has your needs in mind.

Eight hair stylists, carefully selected for their knowledge, talent, and experience in the business, two aestheticians, a masseuse, and an RN, who visits twice a month to administer Botox, ensure customers are groomed and ready for business or pleasure. To complement one's new coif, make-up session, deep tissue massage or hydrodermabrasion facial (it removes imperfections and hydrates the skin), the shopping is right on site.

Their boutique features products from You Name It, Spunky Junkie, and Two-Go Boutique. If you feel a new outfit will compliment your new highlights and eyelash extensions, AllAboutU

Left: Local Yocal owner, Matt Hamilton, inspects cuts of grass-fed beef. Below: The eclectic selection at Diggin' It is all about creativity and good vibes. Right: Brenda Walden is officially proclaimed "Queen of Toffee" by her business peers.



MELINDA MICHELLE



PEGGY SMOLEN

carries a selection of unique clothing lines picked out by Kristen for each season.

"The Ciel clothing is inexpensive but the trendiest clothes that you can possibly find," says Kristin. "The fit and flow compliment the woman who is our customer and the esthetic services we provide."

Don't miss AllAboutU's quarterly Girls Night Out. It's the perfect way to enjoy complimentary beverages, hors d' oeuvres, meet the vendors and stylists, and see what they can do for you.

The Guitar Sanctuary

The Guitar Sanctuary is the North Texas destination for seasoned players or those who are just beginning. Named one of the top 20 coolest guitars stores in the country by *Premier Guitar Magazine* and a magnet for many reputable players who live in the area, TGS is also a must-see for visiting CEOs with a passion for the six-stringed instruments. But it's also about the kids.

Owners George Fuller, Maylee Thomas, and Shane Frame provide a one-on-one experience with the service, attention, and knowledge that comes from playing in the local music scene for years.

Guitar lessons from one of the shop's ten instructors, most UNT music grads, start at \$35 for half an hour. Beginners learn not just the power chords and cool licks, they also learn the thinking behind why Jimi or Eric or Keith played it the way they did.

"We ask parents to tell us about their kids when they come in for lessons," says Shane Frame. "We want a deeper commitment and relationship than just making a sale. Parents are entrusting us with their kids and that, along with our passion for music, we take very seriously."

It's not just a place for guitar gods in training. Piano, bass, and voice lessons are all there; and if you're serious about playing, you could find yourself walking out in a band. The guitars for sale are professional products and the prices reflect that, so newcomers might want to BYOG. "It's more than a guitar shop," says Maylee Thomas. "There's clothing and jewelry for men, women and girls. Original guitar-inspired art by Sergio Lazo adorns the walls. It's an experience."

Air guitarists and fashion unite here. TGS is the place to get your groove on with some tasty riffs or a T-shirt with 'tude.

Walden Farms Toffee

Hear ye, hear ye, kneel in the presence of the Queen of Walden Farms Toffee & Fudge! I'm not kidding people – on your knees, please, it's that good. Crowned by her McKinney business peers as the "Toffee Queen", Brenda Walden's handmade almond toffee reigns supreme in candy land as the toffee of choice. One taste will have you in her thrall for quite some time – or at least until all the candy's gone.

Three quarters of an inch thick, sandwiched between milk chocolate, studded with almonds, this is a toffee connoisseur's dream come true which raises the bar for any toffee that comes down the pike, my friends – but wait, try it yourself. That's handmade you're tasting. And because there can be no fudge without drudge, not one machine was used in the making of any of the other Walden Farms products.

Launched in 2008 after years of cooking fudge which she gave to friends and family over the holidays, Walden finally gave in to their advice, and, lucky for us turned pro. Walden Farms started with the already famous fudge and soon branched into toffee. Since then she's hired three employees to keep up with demand, two thirds of which is for – you guessed it, toffee.

And all that revenue does more than sweeten the bank account, says Walden. Ten percent of the gross income goes to Convoy of Hope, a charitable organization. What could be better than getting and giving with the same dime?

You may now rise. And buy Toffee.

About the author: Steven Nester is an educator and freelance writer who hosts Poets of the Tabloid Murder, a mystery author interview show which may be heard on Public Radio.



LYNZE ALLISON



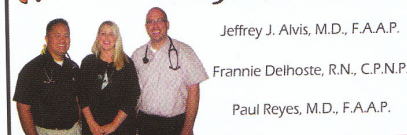
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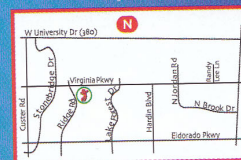
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