

MEET ME IN THE GIFTSHOP!
Re-Stocking the Walker Tavern Mercantile

by

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A study prepared as a part of
GEO 459 Tourism in Regional Development
(Instructor: Dr. Sarah Nicholls, Michigan State University)
and presented to
The Michigan Department of Natural Resources

East Lansing, Michigan, Spring 2012

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	3
II.	Rationale.....	5
III.	Method.....	8
IV.	Analysis.....	11
V.	Recommendations... ..	14
VI.	References.....	20

INTRODUCTION

Walker Tavern is located in Cambridge Junction Historic State Park, Cambridge Township, Michigan, a small town approximately 70 miles southwest of Detroit. During the late nineteenth century, the trip from Detroit to Chicago was a grueling three day affair, if the roads were good. Many times they were not and travelers needed a place to stay and eat. Sylvester and Lucy Walker owned and operated the Walker Tavern at the intersection of the Old Sauk Trail and LaPlaisance Road (now known as US 12 and M 50, respectively) in northern Lenawee County and welcomed these early travelers. The tavern became more than a stopping place for the Detroit-to-Chicago traveler as it grew into the social and civic center of the community.

This northern part of Lenawee County is known as the Irish Hills, and developed into a popular tourist destination in the early 20th century, attracting many of Detroit's autoworkers in search of a pleasant day trip. Improved roads brought further tourism to the Irish Hills region, since this area could be reached easily from Detroit or Toledo, Ohio. In 1921, Frederick Hewitt, an Episcopal minister, purchased the tavern and opened it as a tourist attraction.

The state of Michigan acquired the property in 1965 and restored the tavern to its 1840's condition, and in 1978 opened it as a museum at the Cambridge State Historical Park. Walker Tavern joined the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, one of only eleven sites in the Michigan Historical Museum system ([Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\), 2011](#)). Its mission statement follows:

“Walker Tavern’s historic buildings at Cambridge Junction, Michigan allow the State of Michigan to preserve and interpret Michigan’s settlement and transportation history.

This is accomplished by interpreting the lives of the people who have lived in and around

the crossroads of US 12 and M 50 from the time of Michigan's native peoples to the modern day tourists and business motorists who travel through the Irish Hills."

(Michigan Historical Commission, Department of State, 1999).

Today this entire area is associated with automobile-oriented recreation, from racing, to cruising to the Sunday Drive (MotorCities - Automobile National Heritage Area, 2003). The area is unique in that it also shows the evolution of road development from the early Native American footpath to the modern highway.

In 2011, Cambridge Junction (CJ) was selected as the first of an experimental relationship between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and a select group of MSU faculty from the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies, and the School of Planning, Design and Construction in the College of Agricultural and Natural Resources. This paper addresses the question: *"What kind of merchandise could the museum store carry that would attract more visitors to the site, increase sales, and also contribute to the site's interpretive message of changes in travel as viewed from the crossroads at Cambridge Junction"?*

RATIONALE

In many cases, the measurement of a successful heritage site is not dependent on its historical correctness. Rather, it is contingent on how effective the site is in raising curiosity, and on the quality of its amenities. Amenities in this sense refer to toilets, parking, and the choice of items in the gift shop (Schouten, 1995). Schouten (1995) uses the acronym “UNIQUE” to list ways of increasing a tourist’s satisfaction with a site:

- **Uncommon**
- **Novelty**
- **Informative**
- **Quality**
- **Understanding**
- **Emotions**

Push factors also need to be considered. They are the tourists’ motivations and expectations that they will be entertained and educated, the desire for authenticity and meaning through their experiences, and the desire to consume heritage. Likewise, pull factors include the attractiveness of areas and facilities, and the perception that the destination is educational, cultural, and fun.

Push factors usually outweigh pull factors in deciding whether to visit any destination (Apostolakis, 2003).

In 2011, visitors to CJ were asked to rank the importance of several possibilities for the rejuvenation of the historic Hewitt House. For example, the survey listed options of different types of exhibits, space for community group meetings, refreshments, and a gift shop, with the instructions to rank them in importance to the visitor. The results are shown below, where a

score of 1 indicates least importance and a score of 5 indicates greatest importance. Items are ranked by mean score.

Hewitt House Survey Results:

Item	Score
Exhibits-Michigan's pioneer past	4.69
Visitor services, restrooms	4.62
Space for school groups, workshops, history presentations	4.51
Exhibits - changes in transportation from stagecoaches to automobiles	4.26
Exhibits - 20th century tourism	4.26
Exhibits - Irish Hills History	4.20
Rooms refurnished to 1929	3.86
Archive / reading room about local history	3.83
Gift Shop	3.68
Travel information on Michigan attractions	3.68
Space for community groups for meetings	3.40
Refreshments	3.09
<i>Average score/rank</i>	4.01

At first glance, it does not appear as if the gift shop is a priority for visitors because its score of 3.68 falls below the average score of 4.01. However, we get a different picture if we separate the questions into primary and secondary categories. Primary attractions are those that attract visitors, such as exhibits. Secondary attractions enhance the primary attractions (Law, 1992). Refer to the tables below to see how the original survey results are divided into these two categories. Looking at the averages of the differentiation of primary and

secondary attractions, the presence of a gift shop does not seem so unusual after all, as it falls much closer to average.

Hewitt House Survey Results, Primary Elements:

Primary Elements - Those which attract people	Score
Exhibits-Mich's pioneer past	4.69
Space for school groups, workshops, history presentations	4.51
Exhibits - changes in transportation from stagecoaches to automobiles	4.26
Exhibits - 20th century tourism	4.26
Exhibits - Irish Hills History	4.20
Rooms refurnished to 1929	3.86
Space for community groups for meetings	3.40
<i>Primary Attractions Average score/rank</i>	4.17

Hewitt House Survey Results, Secondary Elements:

Secondary Elements - Those which enhance attractions	Score
Travel info on Mich attractions	4.62
Archive / reading room about local history	3.83
Gift Shop	3.68
Visitor services, restrooms	3.68
Refreshments	3.09
<i>Secondary Attractions Average score/rank</i>	3.78

The success of a gift shop is measured by several factors: educational value, preservation of site, comfort/visitor satisfaction, marketing/sales, and collection of trophies.

Educational Value

Gift shops are a dynamic way to educate the public and nurture a child’s interest in preservation, conservation, and history (APPL, 2008). In this case, a trip to CJ offers the opportunity to

discover local history and get an up close look at how travelers endured the hardships of the journey from Detroit to Chicago. Visitors also learn how invasive species endanger some native species and why conservation is important to keep nature in balance.

Preservation of site

Gift shops are especially vital for heritage sites as they may help to prevent or avert the collection and/or removal of fragments from historical sites (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Gift shops offer a viable alternative for tourists who want to take a piece of a site home with them.

Comfort / Visitor Satisfaction

Shopping also offers a type of comfort and stability of home, of ordinary activity, to help visitors reconnect to a routine. Additionally, it provides a substitute for the familiar (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Having a gift shop results in higher levels of tourist satisfaction (Tosun, Temizkan, Timothy, and Fyall, 2007). Many tourists buy gifts for others (Wilkins, (2011), so gift shops have indirectly expanded their customer base with this additional unseen customer.

Marketing /Sales

The site has an image they'd like to project which can be accomplished by the selection of souvenirs (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Gift shops give the tourist a reason to linger (Schouten, 1995) and perhaps spend more money and time at the site. Word of mouth is an effective and inexpensive way to market a destination, so ensuring a pleasurable visit can go a long way on a thin dime.

Collection of trophies

Per Tosun (2009), tourists tend to share their experiences through photos, videos, and items they purchased while away. Through my own informal research, the trophies are small and simple: refrigerator magnets, shot glasses, or key chains with the logo and name of the destination site.

METHOD

In determining the product assortment for CJ, a sampling of what other state parks/historical sites sell in their gift shops follows.

Upper Tahquamenon Falls State Park:

Description: located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Tahquamenon Falls is known for its waterfalls, wild beauty, and abundant wildlife. Popular items in its gift shop include

(Tahquamenon Falls, n.d.):

- Printed materials
 - Large selection of books for all ages, covering a wide range of Michigan topics
 - Lake Superior
 - Shipwrecks
 - Lighthouses
 - Wildlife of the Upper Peninsula
 - Postcards
 - Maps
- Michigan-made products
 - Locally made baskets
 - Locally made jewelry from Isle Royale greenstone and Petoskey stone
- Art
 - Framed and matted wildlife prints that echo the beauty of the Tahquamenon Falls
 - Wildlife photos - also framed and matted
 - Paintings and prints by wildlife artists
- Products that complement their permanent and special exhibits

Detroit Historical Museum

Description: located in the Museum District of Detroit, the Detroit Historical Museum celebrates not only Detroit's past as a vibrant trading port occupied by the French and its mariner history, but also its recent automotive history and reputation as a haven for sports enthusiasts. Here is a sampling of items found in its gift shop (Detroit Historical Museum, n.d.):

- Printed Material
 - History Books
 - Maritime
 - Local communities
 - Local organizations

- Local landmarks
 - Rise of the automobile industry
 - Greeting cards
 - Postcards, showing vintage photos of local landmarks
- Ship Plans
- Art
 - Vintage lighthouses
- Tiger Stadium items, from Major League Baseball's Detroit Tigers' former stadium
- "Uniquely Detroit Flavor" items
 - Faygo soda pop
 - Better Made potato chips
 - Sanders ice cream toppings

The trait that both locations have in common is that they sell what is unique to their local area.

Uniqueness is important because it can make tourists feel as if they have insider, or hidden, knowledge, that their cohorts don't possess (Swanson, 2004). It is as if they have connected with the action behind the scenes, or peeked behind the curtain to gain a level of understanding that most others do not have. It elevates their experience and increases satisfaction with the site.

ANALYSIS

Per Costa (2009), the demographics of instate tourists within the State of Michigan show that although the average age is between 40 and 44 years old, the age group that represents the highest percentage of leisure visitor days is the 18-34 year olds. The second largest group is the 55 and older group, which also spends the most per trip. Conversely, it is the 18-34 year olds that spend the least per trip. As is true with most tourism, visiting friends and relatives is the primary motivation for travel. After dining out, shopping is the second most engaged in tourist activity. Again, per Costa (2009), the top ten tourist origins, in order of highest contributing percentages, are: Detroit; Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Battle Creek; Traverse City-Cadillac; Flint-Saginaw-Bay City; Chicago, IL; Lansing; Marquette; South Bend-Elkhart, IN; Toledo, OH; Atlanta, GA. Chicago residents tend to spend the most per trip (\$527), with residents originating from Michigan spending an average of \$364 by comparison. Instate tourists travel an average of 332 miles one way to their destination, with those from the southeastern region of the state driving the most one way miles (382). The average mileage driven one way by car is 200 miles. The table below compares the mileage to Cambridge Junction from a variety of tourist origins.

City-to-City Mileage

Distance (in miles) from CJ to:	
Toledo, OH	58
Lansing, MI	60
Detroit, MI	70
Battle Creek, MI	70
Kalamazoo, MI	87
Flint, MI	97
Elkhart, IN	113
Grand Rapids, MI	127
South Bend, IN	127
Saginaw, MI	128

Distance (in miles) from CJ to:	
Bay City, MI	138
Cadillac, MI	194
Chicago, IL	216
Traverse City, MI	240
Marquette, MI	460
Atlanta, GA	715



Michigan tourists travel an average of 200 miles each way by car.

In terms of transportation, four out of five Michigan leisure visitor-days were represented by visitors traveling by auto (Costa, 2009).

Based on findings by Swanson and Horridge (2006), the average visitor to CJ fits the History and Parks category. These folks tend to buy crafts, postcards, and books about the area. Silberberg (1995) goes further with characteristics of the average visitor to a heritage site. He has determined that they are:

- Higher wage earners
- More likely to shop
- More highly educated
- More women than men
- Older age categories
- Less leisure time, but more emphasis on quality time

Women also tend to purchase souvenirs more frequently than men (Wilkins, 2011).

Cambridge Junction Historic State park is analogous to an unpolished gem. It has great potential, as well as some opportunities to improve itself, as seen by the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) that follows.

Strengths:

- Targeting a lesser known time period
- Is one of only a few state parks that contains a historical building
- *“Restoring an historic tourist attraction from the automotive era as an historical tourist attraction would make the site unique in the region”* (Evans, 2003)
- Has enormous potential to draw regional tourists to the site
- Is part of the Heritage Auto Trail

Weaknesses

- Park hours are not practical for working families to visit
- Gift shop not yet at full potential

Opportunities

- Living history program
- Educational Programming at Walker Tavern
 - Partner with:
 - Local / regional schools to provide historical fieldtrips
 - Home-schoolers
 - History departments of nearby colleges
- Expand hours
 - Open when neighboring Michigan International Speedway (MIS) is in full swing, since those attending the races often come for the weekend and are looking for something to do. People are already in area
 - Expand the closing time until sunset instead of 5:00 pm as it is now. The current hours are not practical for working families.
- Build relationships:
 - Underground Railroad
 - Michigan Department of Transportation
 - Tag onto MIS race day, since the population is already there.

Threats

- Unless visiting MIS, the location is not convenient.
- Roads / intersections may be expanded to accommodate MIS traffic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to make plausible recommendations of product assortment, it is necessary to look at what CJ has sold in the past. Per the Walker Mercantile Report of 2011, top sellers were postcards, hats, T-shirts, hoodies, canned goods, baseball cards, flag pins, and books. To get additional input for what is selling, I feel it is important to separate the broad category of “Items Sold” into two descriptive groups: Souvenirs, and Food etc. By doing this, it becomes apparent that souvenirs comprise approximately 70% of sales. The remaining 30% of sales is from candy, peanuts, cider, et cetera. Cheryl Valentine, CJ Historian, expressed a wish for an outdoor patio immediately outside the gift shop where folks could sit and enjoy root beer (Valentine, 2012). Research shows that the exterior of a shop can be an important selling tool (Timothy, 2005). Other items on her wish list include books about local history, and models of cars that are nicer than Matchbox-type cars.

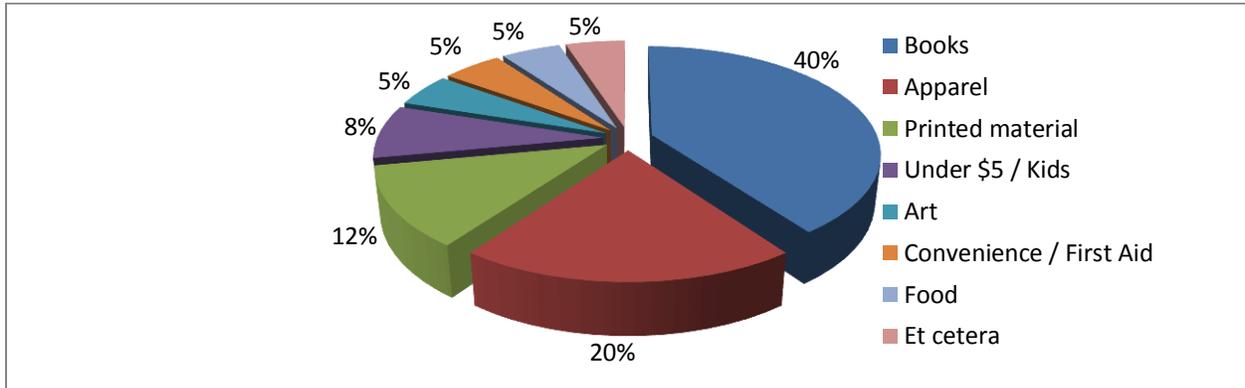
The following list is a suggested guide to the broad area of product assortment. Specific recommendations are listed separately in an Appendix. Products should be:

- UNIQUE (refer to “Rationale” section)
- Educational
 - Communicate the history of the park and regional area.
 - Introduce visitors to state parks.
 - Help them to explore the area (Apparel And Gifts at Nevada State Parks Cooperative Shops, 2008).
- Keep most merchandise in the \$20 - \$25 and under range. (APPL, 2008; Adrian, 2011).

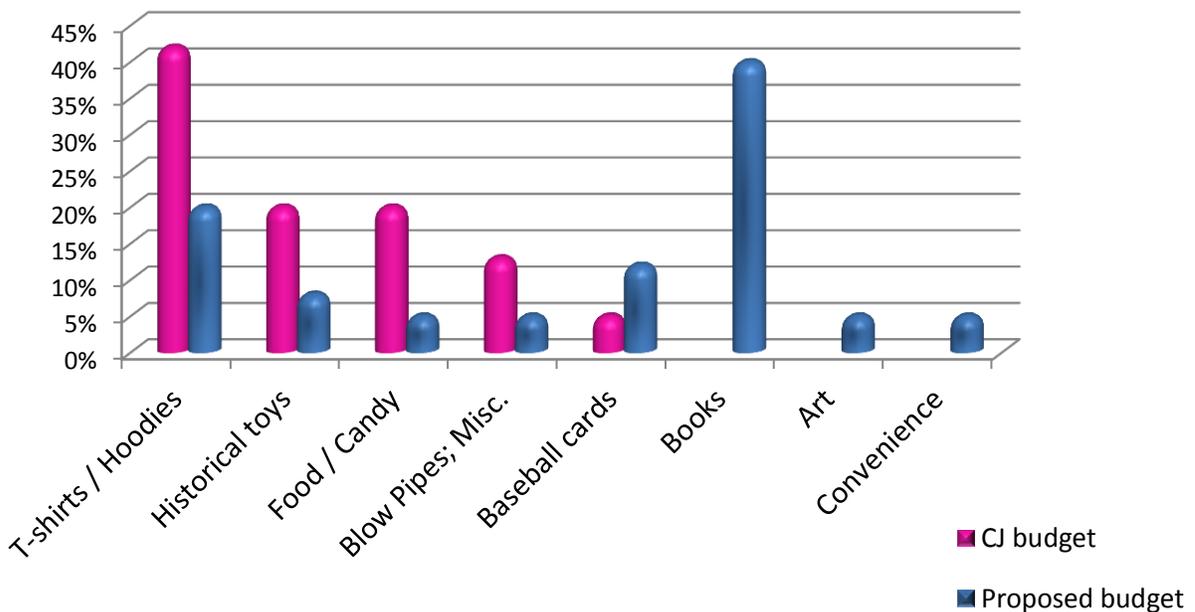
- . The regional connection is important, as people want souvenirs that are specific to the region/area, not general items (Wilkins, 2011).
- Outdoorsy tourists are attracted to rustic-type appearance stores where crafts are demonstrated at the site (Swanson & Horridge, 2006)
- Authentic local crafts - Souvenirs serve as touchable evidence of having found the authentic. This is not a new concept, but goes back to the late 1800s. Tourists want to feel as if they have connected with life behind the scenes. They want to feel as if they have insider knowledge, or real insight with the area that their peers don't possess. "Authentic" is often bandied around with "unique," that is, having something that no one else has. Guidelines include (Swanson, 2004):
 - Avoid mass produced objects
 - Avoid those that are labeled as having been manufactured in other countries.
 - For the demographic of History and Parks tourists / Ethnic, Arts, and People tourists, the most important attributes are:
 - Traditional colors natural materials, quality construction, and workmanship,
 - Not a copy or duplicate, genuineness, using a traditional or regional design, , handmade, a product's function and use.
 - Historical representation, or a link to the past, is also important.
- Tourists more willing to spend money on souvenirs if displays were high quality, imaginative, and attractive (Swanson & Horridge,2006).

To further drill down, it is recommended that at least 40% of the inventory budget go toward books, 20% toward apparel, 12% to printed materials, and 8% for items geared toward children /

items under \$5. Eighty percent of sales should come from these four categories, with the remaining 20% coming from art, convenience items, food, and miscellaneous. This distribution is shown graphically below.

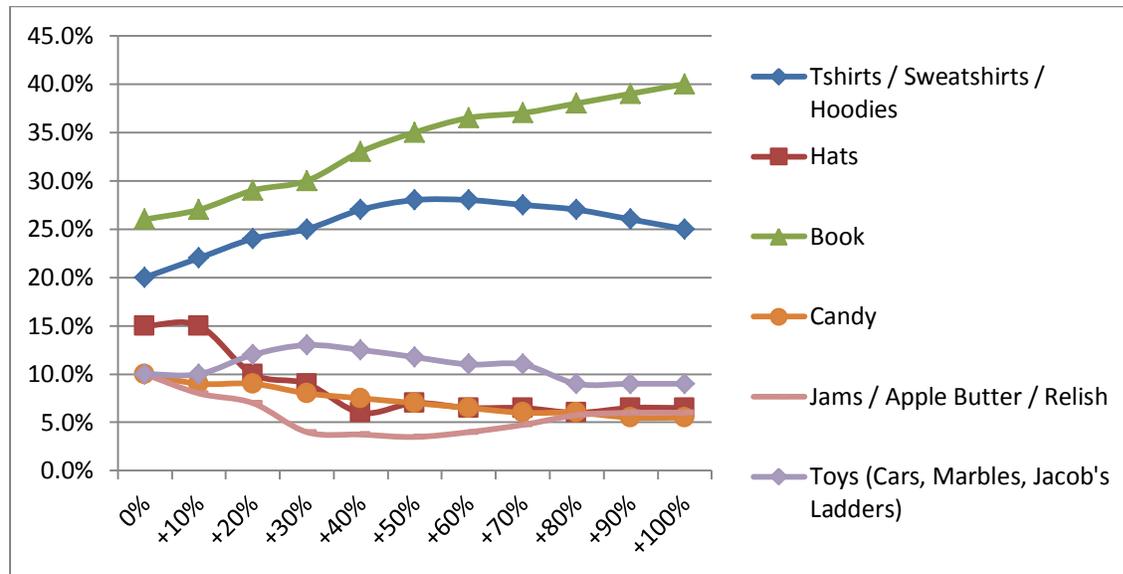


How is this different from the current CJ budget? The proposed budget invests more in baseball cards, books, art, and convenience items. It also suggests spending less on apparel, toys, and candy.



Approaching the recommended product assortment will pose a financial challenge, so instead of trying to reach suggested levels at first try, it may be prudent to ease into the changed balance of

inventory. The graph below shows how different product assortment can be achieved with varying levels of funding.



For example, at current funding (0%), 25% is allocated for books, 20% for apparel, 15% for hats, and 10% each for candy, miscellaneous foods, and toys. At double the current funding (100%), 35% of the budget is for books, 25% for apparel, and less than 10% each for the four remaining categories. Note that categories with smaller percentages do not appear on this chart for ease of interpretation, so the chart categories represented above will not add up to 100%. Another noteworthy comment regarding this chart is that categories are not being cut or taken away from. Rather, as levels of funding increase, the percentage spent on some categories decrease.

Baseline measurements are a convenient way to track improvement. I recommend the measurement of dollars earned per numbers of visitors. My assumptions:

- CJ is open approximately 100 days per season.
- 2011 actual sales
 - \$2222 souvenirs and food

- \$465 root beer
- Total 2011 sales= \$2687
- Approx. 200 visitors per day
- (100 days) x (200 visitors per day) = 20,000 total visitors in one season
- $\$2687 / 20,000 = 13.43 \text{ cents per visitor}$

This means that currently each visitor to CJ spends just over 13 cents per visit. For the first year, doubling this amount is a worthy goal. Here are marketing suggestions that can help toward increasing the average monies spent per visitor:

- Have a simple logo either using a stagecoach or something that represents 1930s tourism. Use it on everything.
- Aggressively market root beer
 - “BEST ROOTBEER ON THE OLD SAUK TRAIL”
 - Sell root beer / root beer floats at a higher price than normal, perhaps \$5. For an extra \$1, keep the mug (a nice glass mug with CJ logo)
 - Also sell mugs for a higher than normal price. Steer customers toward “keep the mug” sale.
- Sell t-shirts that commemorate special events, for example, Civil War re-enactment, Walker on Wheels, Walker Wheels baseball, Walker Farmers Market. Make sure to include the year, so tourists/participants can start a collection.
- Group displays according to TOPIC, not product group. Ex. Group cookbooks and cooking utensils together, group books, postcards, photos of baseball team together. Sell baseball shirts? Have appropriate display signage.

- Have a “SALE” table, position toward back of area so customers have to walk through entire shop to get to it.
- Provide seating immediately outside shop for elderly and/or tired guests (if no patio).
- Keep a journal near the checkout area, where employees and guests can make note of what they like and what they’d like to see in gift shop to assist in funding gift shop items for the next year. This promotes wise use of dollars.

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Wander through, discover my outstanding gifts!!! I wish I could personally meet each and every one who visits. I trust that with time we'll get to know each other!!! Please, feel free to send me a message, if you need any help. Thank you for visiting "My name is..." gift shop!!! Follow me on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mynameisgiftshop> Follow me on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mynameisgiftshop>. Let me assure you it has turned out to be amazing! It just supplements a perfect gift in the most elegant way! My Workshop All my creations are manufactured in my fully equipped workshop, which I have set up with my husband's help. My first sewing machine was actually a gift from him when he realized how much I was enjoying sewing on one my mom used to have.