

SPOTLIGHT ON . . . The Costume Trunk

July 2009

“Spotlights” is a new series focusing on Main Street business owners – who they are, what they do, how they do it, and why. The series consists of short, informative, interviews to introduce or, in some cases, remind the community of our loyal, local businesses who keep Main Street humming.

The Costume Trunk (www.costumetrunk.com)

Owner: Steve Spain
710 W. Main St., Peoria, IL

Hours:

10am – 5pm M-F
10am – 4pm Sat (10am – 2pm in Summer)
extended hours Oct-Dec.
by appointment anytime

1. What do you sell or what service do you provide?

The Costume Trunk supplies motion-picture/Broadway quality costumes that have been tailor-made by professional costume makers. Many of our costumes have been made by Benjamin Morelli who has costumed shows on Broadway and whose past clients include Luciano Pavarotti, the Ringling Brothers Circus and a long list of other A-list stars. Our store also stocks a full line of theatrical make-up, wigs, and is the largest supplier of period hats in the country.

2. How long have you been at your current address?

The Costume Trunk has been at 710 W. Main Street for 28 years. We previously occupied space at the Varsity Theater located at 1216 W. Main Street. The art deco theater was torn down in the 1980's to make way for the current CampusTown development.

3. How do customers hear about you? Who are your customers?

The Costume Trunk is the only source for high-quality theatrical and specialty costumes between Chicago and St. Louis. We are situated within easy access from I-74 and pull customers from over a 100-mile radius of Peoria. With the exception of Halloween, most customers call in advance with very specific requests.

4. What brought you to Main Street initially?

The Costume Trunk first occupied space downtown at the Rialto Theater located at 213 SW Jefferson. At the time, they carried primarily magic and novelty items and traded on theater-going audiences. When the Rialto was torn down we moved to the Varsity Theater on Main Street in order to maintain our customer base. Finally, when the Varsity was torn down and we were forced to vacate once again, the space at 710 was available for purchase at a good price and allowed us to stay along the Main Street Corridor. We would finally own our own space and not be forced out by another landlord.

5. Why do you stay on Main Street?

I stay on Main Street because I own the building; it's affordable; the neighboring businesses are friendly; and I think it's a good place for local start-ups to build a business. My store is a destination, so I feel confident that my customers will find me, no matter what. And, I like it here. It feels like home.

6. How did you start your business? What is your background and qualifications?

I was a psychology major and a theater minor at Illinois State University. I had a magic/illusion act that I perfected in College and I learned most of the technical aspects of theater as a student. I earned money as a projectionist at movie theaters and then became a theater manager. In the mid-70's I opened a magic and novelty shop at the Rialto Theater downtown. When that building was torn down I moved to the Varsity Theater on Main Street. No one locally was carrying adult Halloween costumes at that time and we felt there was a market for that kind of thing. We stocked a few and they sold like crazy. These days you can find a Halloween super store anywhere, but back then it was still a unique market. We were one of the first suppliers of adult Halloween costumes and novelties when it was first becoming popular.

7. What do you like most about your day?

I meet so many different people and almost all of them are happy and excited about an upcoming show or party or event. I get to share in their fun and success!

8. Name one thing would you like to see change on main street

The proximity of speeding cars to the sidewalk, pedestrians, and my storefront windows. That's more than one!

9. What is number one best-seller or oddest item/request?

Our Santa Claus costume is by far the number one popular item. After that, the Roaring Twenties are very popular rentals. Contrary to what most people believe, adding "costume" to the end of a noun does not mean that I carry it. I don't have a table costume or a 57 Chevy costume!

10. What is unique about your store?

We're locally owned and operated. We carry very high quality products. I know my customers and I'm here to help.

11. How many employees do you have?

We're just a "mom and pop". I have one part-timer and I call in family to help during the busy season.

12. What is your busy season/time?

October, November and December are the busy months for us. This coming Fall we will be opening up a retail costume shop next door for Halloween so I hope to be especially busy this year!

13. What other types of businesses would you like to see on Main Street?

I think Main Street is perfect for small, locally-owned or independently owned stores. We have lower rents and older buildings full of character. Additional ethnic restaurants would be great or an art gallery. Specialty stores of one kind or another would be a good fit.