



**AFTER HOURS**  
 Mark Shapiro, JCC executive director, received the Lee Kass Award Sept. 15 at The Pfister Hotel. **A21**

# Finding the right partner

Wedding dress shop to share space with George Watts

BY WENDY STRONG  
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In their quest to grow their wedding dress business, the new owners of Zita Bridal Salon have found what they call the perfect marriage. This past summer Cynthia Apfelbach and Marina Kuhn bought the Whitefish Bay bridal boutique and are moving it to downtown Milwaukee to share space with George Watts & Son.

The two women bought the Zita Bridal Salon name and its assets, but formed a new company called C&M Boutique Inc. They said they had no plans of moving from the Whitefish Bay location, 205 E. Silver Spring Drive, when they took over in June, but the opportunity to move to the Watts building on North Jefferson and East Mason streets made good business sense.

**BRIDES WORK,**  
 women are  
 downtown.'

**Cynthia Apfelbach**  
 Zita Bridal Salon

“These days brides work, women are downtown.”

Apfelbach and Kuhn are investing about \$50,000 in new inventory and plan to spend about \$75,000 on renovations to their space in the Watts building. They plan to open the downtown location in mid-November.

“It’s rare you can get two businesses in the same industry that don’t compete and can actually work together,” said Sam Watts, chief executive officer of George Watts & Son Inc.

The iconic downtown business is known



SCOTT PAULUS

Cynthia Apfelbach, right, with Marina Kuhn... “Moving downtown creates a destination and puts us closer to our demographic.”

for its fine china, dinnerware and luxury gifts along with its tea room on the second floor. Watts said Zita is a perfect fit because brides may want to register or find other wedding ideas at his store while shopping for dresses.

Watts said he is investing about \$100,000 into upgrades to his building before Zita moves in. Watts is renovating the north showroom that will be occupied by the bridal salon, as well as constructing a new entrance in the center of the building for Watts customers. The store received a \$30,000 Retail Investment Fund grant from the city of Milwaukee as part of the project, Watts said.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

The salon now has a Facebook and Twitter account. It also has a QR code; potential customers scan the code with a smartphone and are taken directly to Zita’s website.

“We’re doing a lot of social networking, which is something Zita didn’t do before,” Kuhn said.

In addition, Kuhn said they are leasing window space at The Shops of Grand Avenue on West Wisconsin Avenue in downtown Milwaukee until the end of December to advertise their store and the move.

The Zita co-owners plan to make an effort to reach out to the community through their business. In July, they hosted Brides Across America at the Whitefish Bay store and donated 25 wedding dresses. The national charitable organization unites military brides and bridal salons across the country to support military troops and their families.

After moving to downtown Milwaukee, Apfelbach and Kuhn hope to host and participate in more area events to build awareness of their business.

“We want to provide the Zita experience, we want it to be a place that’s gracious and lovely,” said Apfelbach, as she described the chandelier that will hang in the center of the new downtown salon to set the tone for that experience.

Apfelbach and Kuhn plan to build up the bridal business first and then add special occasion dresses. They also plan to cater to future brides by offering dresses for high school graduations, communions and debutante balls. Another priority is to start working with designers who are making dresses for “plus size” women.

“We want Zita to be a place where all women feel they can come and are welcome,” Apfelbach said.

**LESSONS LEARNED**  
 BY CYNTHIA APFELBACH & MARINA KUHN

**WHAT WAS YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION:** “Moving downtown.”

**WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY:** “Embrace change.”

**WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE:** “Deciding where to direct our resources.”

**WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE:** “To be the premiere bridal salon in southeastern Wisconsin where women come for their weddings and special occasions. We also want to tap into the Chicago market.”

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