



Meet the Owner, Julie Delgrosso, Co-Owner, The Christmas House

Describe Your Business

The Christmas House is a seasonal gift shop in Elmira, NY that is housed in a Queen Anne Victorian mansion. In its 37th year, the shop is often described as "not just for Christmas any more" as some of the best-selling departments in the store include gourmet foods, ladies accessories and jewelry. Not content to be "just" one of the most photographed buildings in the region, The Christmas House has also won numerous awards for their customer service and product knowledge, the most recent being the September edition of Giftbeat, a highly regarded gift business publication.

Tell us your story:

Co-owners Julie and Mark Delgrosso in earlier years might have fit the "opposites attract" description. Julie was (and is) a Christmas "nut", the first one up Christmas morning even now! Mark on the other hand started his Christmas journey more as the Grinch (but, like the Grinch, came to see the error in his ways.) Julie worked for the Chemung County Office for the Aging for 15 years when the original owners (who were her landlords at the time) asked her to help them with a few business aspects of opening a Christmas store. She was, of course, delighted to assist and worked for them part-time. A few years later, Julie found an old stone house in Watertown, NY and had a purchase offer in for that property to open a Christmas store when Elaine came to her with the idea that she purchase Elmira's Christmas House. The rest, as they say, is history.

History of The Christmas House:

The dream began in 1983 when owners Elaine and Tony DiBiase purchased the home and decided to open a 3-room Christmas shop in September of that year. The house was recolored as a "painted lady" in 1988 by local colorist Paul Murphy and has been featured in the coffee table book "America's Painted Ladies". In 1993, The Christmas House was purchased by Julie and Mark Delgrosso, who continue to operate the business today.

What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

Other retailers then and now have been invaluable in helping us become the best retailers we can be. Even to this day, 26+ years into owning the business, I still attend workshops, webinars and am an active member of a Mastermind group of retailers throughout the country. I never miss the opportunity to talk to other retailers! No part of our success story can be told without making mention of the wonderful employees ("elves") that have been so loyal and engaging, many for over 20 years.

What inspires you?

Customers are my #1 inspiration. I just **love** hearing how a gift from The Christmas House made their friend light up with delight. Oh...and the sharing of their memories that include The Christmas House. We are now on our third generation of families who have come here a certain time each year as an annual sojourn. It is no exaggeration when I say that **every** day we are given inspiration by shoppers who share their stories with us.

What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

I think the biggest challenge is continuing to be viable to the next generation of shoppers who do most everything online. The idea of getting in a car, going to a store, getting out of the car, etc., is somewhat foreign to many younger people. It's a constant challenge to come up with ways to engage the next generation.

What is your favorite local activity?

If you're referring to store activity my answer is this: Oh there are just so many store activities that are loads of fun.....it's like you asking me to pick a favorite child! The private shopping parties are so relaxing and fun plus I get to meet new people.

Community Activity:

We attend many charitable fundraisers and love contributing. Of course the Arctic League is a favorite, knowing how many children are having a wonderful Christmas morning because of the generosity of our community.

Is there anything else we should know about you?

I'm originally from Gouverneur, NY and came to Elmira to attend college. I had agreed to stay in Elmira "temporarily" to finish up working on a program I was involved with. 40 years later.....I'm still here! I love the rolling hills, the mild winters, the nice people who live here, and the great number of activities there are to do or become involved in.

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