

Shanna Lindberg – Soul Sister Ceramics

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Soul sister.” The term implies a kinship, a virtual sisterhood, a deep connection. Today we'll learn about two young women who have formed a creative business together and are now connecting with customers across the nation. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Shanna Lindberg and Michelle Lindberg are co-founders of this remarkable business known as Soul Sister Ceramics. Shanna grew up at Scandia in north central Kansas. She earned a degree in broadcast journalism at KU and married a farmer from Courtland. She worked for the local radio station for a time and then stayed home when her children were born.

Among her friends at Courtland was Michelle Lindberg, a local nurse. “Our husbands are first cousins,” Shanna said. The two young women hit it off.

“We were talking about finding a hobby that we could do together,” Shanna said. “Michelle had a mug that I really loved.” That inspired them to try making ceramic pottery.

“We bought a kiln on Craigslist and made some pieces of jewelry,” Shanna said. Not only was it fun, other people wanted to buy their products. This became a business. At first, they listed their products for sale on an Etsy page.

They wrestled with what to name the business. Then Michelle suggested Soul Sister Ceramics. “We are kindred spirits, and I liked the alliterative sound of the name,” Shanna said. Soul Sister Ceramics was born.

“It would be fun to have our own building someday,” Shanna thought, such as the former gas station on the corner in downtown Courtland. Shanna mentioned her interest to Republic County Economic Development director Luke Mahin. He explained that the city owned that building and encouraged her to approach the city. In the end, they bought the building.

“The old car lift in the back is our pottery table, and we opened a boutique shop in the front,” Shanna said. “We had a ‘paint your own pottery’ party and it was a lot of fun,” she said.

Today, Soul Sister Ceramics sells pottery made from Kansas clay, plus a whole host of other hand-selected boutique items. These include jewelry, accessories, home furnishings, clothing, children's games, candles, and much more, many of these items made in Kansas. “The boutique side of the business has become my favorite,” Shanna said.

Soul Sister Ceramics is a member of the From the Land of Kansas program operated by the Kansas Department of Agriculture. “That is a great program,” Shanna said.

“Walk-in painting has been popular,” Shanna said. People come in and paint a piece of pottery with a glaze. Shanna will then fire it in the kiln. When the people return in a week, they can pick up their own hand-painted piece of pottery that is food safe, microwave safe, and oven safe.

“I’ve been amazed at the people who come in for our pottery,” Shanna said. “We’ve been in our physical location for two years, and (the growth has) kind of blown my mind away,” she said.

As mentioned, the store is located in a former corner gas station. For environmental protection reasons, the underground tanks and old gas pumps were removed years ago. In order to restore the classic look of the building, the local PRIDE group found a set of non-working gas pumps to put in their place. Those pumps now bear the logo of Soul Sister Ceramics. “Every once in a while, someone will pull in and try to get gas,” Shanna said.

Through online sales, Soul Sister Ceramics has shipped products all over the country. “People like to order our handmade mugs and jewelry,” Shanna said. “At Christmas time, our ceramic Christmas ornaments are really popular,” she said.

It’s great to find this business in a rural community like Courtland, population 285 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to www.soulsisterceramics.com.

“Soul sister.” This refers to two women who share a bond. In this case, these two women are sharing a business. We commend Shanna Lindberg and Michelle Lindberg of Soul Sister Ceramics for making a difference with creativity and entrepreneurship. This is good for the rural economy and it’s good for the soul.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.