

TINY SHOP PROFILE

The Chef Shoppe at Huntley Shops on Main

By JANELLE WALKER

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This is an occasional feature on the independent retailers at Huntley's Shops on Main and McHenry's Riverwalk Shoppes. The retail incubators hope these small businesses will later open permanent stores in their communities.

Responses have been edited for space and clarity.

The Chef Shoppe

Location: Huntley Shops on Main, 11879 Main St., Huntley.

Hours: The 10 Main Street retail incubator shops are open Friday, Saturday and Sunday through the end of the December.

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Joanne Thomas, owner of The Chef Shoppe:

I am excited about all of my products: the spice blends, gourmet butters, vegan products, fry batters, refreshers, dressing and dipping sauce. I put my heart and soul into creating these and I love when my customers are just as excited about them as I am.

What is your origin story?

My love for cooking began at just 6 years old with an Easy-Bake Oven. Some of my favorite childhood memories are cooking alongside my mom and my upstairs neighbor, making fresh homemade rolls and bread from scratch. Those early experiences sparked a passion that has stayed with me my entire life – I always found a reason to celebrate or have a gathering of family and friends. When I joined the U.S. Marine Corps, that passion never left. Rather than eating at the chow hall, I often prepared my own meals in the barracks using nothing more than a hot plate, an electric skillet and a microwave.

What is your relationship to Huntley?

I currently teach Culinary Classes



Photo provided by Joanne Thomas

Joanne Thomas at her store, The Chef Shoppe, at the Huntley Shops on Main. A U.S. Marine veteran, Thomas also teaches culinary classes at Huntley High School.

at Huntley High School and am a dual credit/adjunct professor at McHenry County College. A veteran, I'm a member of the Huntley Legion, where I do Chef Pop-Ups and have been a participant of Huntley, Woodstock and Crystal Lake farmers markets. Before launching my retail collection, I was an Executive Chef at NIU and when the pandemic happened, I lost my job and decided to launch my retail collection.

What made you decide to apply for a Huntley Shops on Main spot?

I'm always asked "when are you opening a restaurant?" I thought this would be a good opportunity to expand my retail brand to those who haven't heard about me yet.



Photo provided by Joanne Thomas

Spice blends made by Joanne Thomas are just one of the highlights of her storefront, The Chef Shoppe, at Huntley's Shops on Main.

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