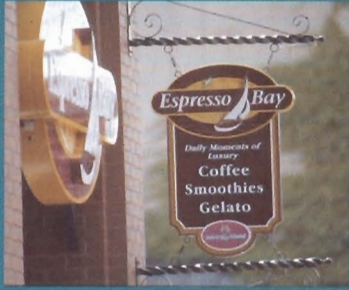


THE



FRONT



STREET



Experience



BY CARI NOGA



Tom McManus may quite possibly have the best workplace in the world: the shady, ivy-walled plaza next to Chase Bank, across from Horizon Books, in downtown Traverse City.

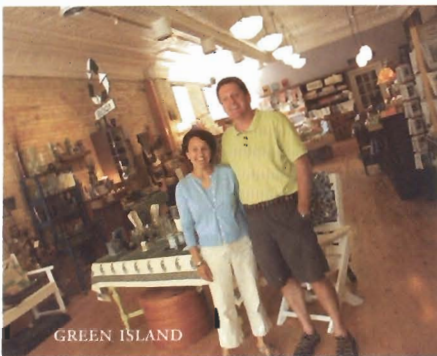
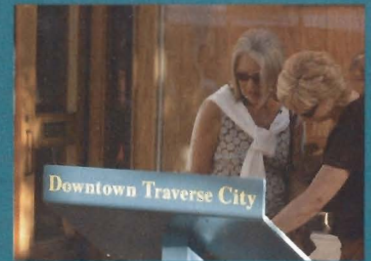
In this little oasis, McManus runs his hot dog stand, Tom and Jerry's Dog House, from early spring to mid-fall, dispensing fragrant Koegel's sausages to eager tourists, office workers and buttoned-down professionals who drift to nearby benches to eat.

Front Street is Traverse City's main shopping thoroughfare, but its picturesque nineteenth-century architecture and generous plantings of shade trees give it a distinct small-town flavor. And while it's easy enough to drive there, it's the kind of place that invites you to park the car and walk.

Just ask Steve Kellman. He's worked downtown for more than a decade, and even lives nearby. Whether he's heading out for lunch at one of downtown's many small restaurants, picking up some groceries at the weekend farmers' market or taking the



*You can buy a camera, a canoe or a copy of the latest best-seller. Dine on classic comfort food, sample intriguing regional cuisines, or sip a cool local chardonnay al fresco at a sidewalk bistro.*



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Clustered along the tree-shaded sidewalks of Front Street, Traverse City's eclectic stores and galleries hold surprises for shoppers of every taste and interest.

**Opposite:** One of the delights of shopping in downtown Traverse City is being able to meet and chat with the owners of local shops.

Chances are, they'll end up sitting next to somebody else who's sipping a lemonade, licking an ice cream cone, or simply watching the world go by: hand-holding couples, families traipsing with toddlers, gaggles of girlfriends laden with shopping bags.

That's what a downtown Traverse City excursion is all about. By the time it's over, you may indeed head home with that cozy fleece pullover, those jars of cherry salsas and jams, or some other Up North treasures. But in the meantime, day or night, it's the street ambience that makes Traverse City's downtown so much fun.

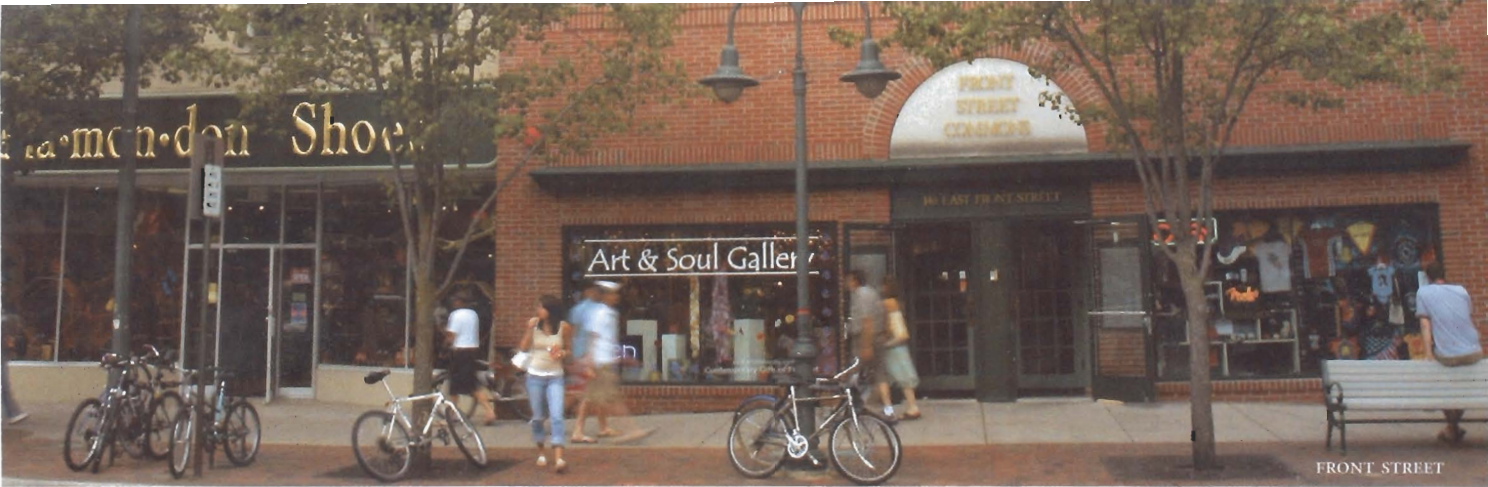
family to Friday Night Live – the weekly late-summer block party where they shut down Front Street for an evening of food, entertainment and socializing – Kellman says it's the "pedestrian scale" of downtown that makes it special.

"It's a great communal feeling walking down the street as a pedestrian instead of driving down it," says Kellman. "It's great leaving the car behind for a while."

And if you're looking for a good place to leave it, try the public parking deck just east of Park Street. If ever a parking deck deserved to be described as "charming," it's this Victorian-styled structure with its facing of warm orange brick. But don't let the looks fool you – it's completely up-to-date.

That's equally true of the shops, boutiques and cafes that line the streets of downtown Traverse City. Behind those small-town display windows, you'll find a range of goods and services you'd expect only in a much larger city.





You can buy a camera, a canoe or a copy of the latest best-seller. Get your hair styled or sample a fine cigar. Dine on classic comfort food, sample intriguing regional and ethnic cuisines, or sip a cool local chardonnay al fresco at a sidewalk bistro. Find clothing and home furnishings that run the gamut from dressy traditional and cottage-casual to hip, urban and cutting-edge.

*Downtown Traverse City is a lot more vibrant than it was even three, four years ago*



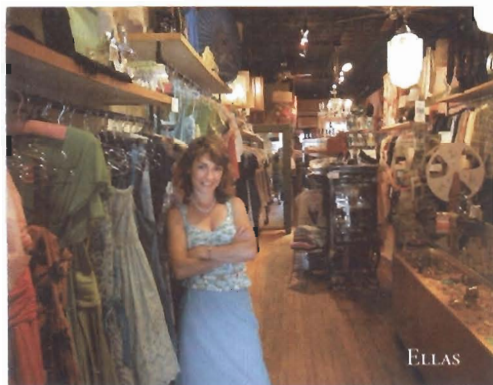
In the summer, most shops beckon visitors with wide-open doors. A dozen different cafes and coffee shops offer sidewalk tables – great places to soak up more of the streetscape and sample the breeze off Grand Traverse Bay, just a block away. Some of the most popular tables are in front of Horizon Books, which is as much a community meeting place as a store. Horizon not only keeps the longest hours on Front Street, it also offers scheduled entertainment in its ground-floor coffee shop, the Horizon Shine Cafe.

The opulent 1897 City Opera House also offers a regular schedule of plays, concerts and recitals, including several appearances by the Traverse Symphony Orchestra. (With all its gilt and glitter, the Opera House is almost a show in itself, even when there isn't anything scheduled onstage.)

Rob Baciagalupi, deputy director of the city's Downtown Development Authority, said downtown nightlife has increased exponentially in recent years, drawing visitors to Front Street long after dusk. "It's a lot more vibrant than it was even three, four years ago," he said.

So, whether you seek shopping, dinner or entertainment – or just a nice bench -- downtown Traverse City is a great destination.

CARI NOGA IS A TRAVERSE CITY-BASED FREELANCE WRITER WHOSE STORIES REGULARLY APPEAR IN CONSUMER, TRADE AND ONLINE PUBLICATIONS.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** With its benches, fountains, brick sidewalks and evocative 19th century buildings, downtown Traverse City is an imaginative, pedestrian-friendly blend of old and new.

**Opposite:** Whether it's jewelry, artwork, furniture or clothing, Traverse City's shops and boutiques specialize in the unique, the quirky and the unexpected

In fact, music and song can be sampled at several other downtown restaurants, including Poppycok's and the Coldstone Creamery, in addition to the long-standing lineup at nearby night spots like Union Street Station, the Loading Dock and the Firefly Cafe.

