

This Is Home: Tina Crowe & Sweet Tea Williamsburg

“I was born in Williamsburg, I was raised in Williamsburg, and I never left,” says Tina Crowe, owner of the boutique Sweet Tea on Main Street. She remembers Williamsburg in the eighties, when Lafayette was the only high school around and the best word to describe the town was “rural”. Her dad owned a convenience store that she describes as a kind of family-run 7-11, which he later developed into a strip center. “Our entire family—that’s what we did,” says Tina, “that’s what we knew, that’s what was ingrained in me.” And so, before she was even born, foundations were built for her of hard work, small business, community, and Williamsburg. “I definitely miss some of the small-town charm from when I grew up,” says Tina, “but I also like not having to travel to Newport News or Richmond to shop or to get decent food.”

Looking to get back to the family business atmosphere after her divorce, Tina opened Life is Good Williamsburg in 2016. “I love Life is Good, I love their products,” says Tina. Unfortunately, trying to maintain an entire store of it proved to be very challenging, especially when half the customers who walked in didn’t know what Life is Good was. “You wouldn’t believe how many people [thought] it was an LG store,” says Tina—meaning LG the multinational electronics company, instead of an apparel and accessories retailer that donates 10% of its net profits to the Life is Good Kids Foundation. “A lot of the products that I currently carry in the shop, I carried when I was Life is Good,” says Tina—but she found that people weren’t coming in because they thought she only sold Life is Good products. Though the popularity of Life is Good has increased in Williamsburg since her opening, it simply wasn’t enough—so Tina rebranded as Sweet Tea.

Make no mistake, many of Sweet Tea’s offerings are the same products Tina carried when she was Life is Good—she wasn’t a franchise, after all—but her biggest addition, as a self-proclaimed dress junkie, was fashion. Most of her products, clothing included, “either give back to various organizations, or they’re somewhat local, and I try to stay primarily with that theme,” says Tina. “I try to find products that have stories behind them, and that’s important to me, because that’s how I started off with Life is Good.” Equally important to Tina is, as she learned early in life, to give back to her own community: Sweet Tea did a huge clothing drive for House of Mercy and FISH this past February, in which customers donated over 15,000 pieces of clothing. Tina credits her customer base for the success, but Sweet Tea’s role as a rallying point should not be underestimated.

During the current mandated storefront closure, Tina has taken to social media—Sweet Tea Williamsburg has Facebook and Instagram pages through which folks can purchase anything she has in the shop. In addition to contact-free curbside pickup and limited delivery, “I’ve also started doing things like care packages and shipping,” says Tina. But with Sweet Tea closed for a full month now, Tina has rediscovered what she loves most about the shop: her customers.

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