



PHOTOS BY ARNOLD GOLD — NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Christine Chiocchio, left, and Christina Herrick stand amid the offerings in their new store, Seaside Home & Gifts, in Branford's Stony Creek.

# Creekers, visitors will feel at home

## New shop focuses on the best Stony Creek has to offer

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**BRANFORD** » Enter the recently opened Seaside Home and Gifts next door to Stony Creek Market. Meet co-owners Christine Chiocchio (pronounced key-O-kyo) and Christina Herrick.

Peruse the artfully staged, eclectic assortment of tasteful items. There's pretty much something for everyone.

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Need an item for a special event? Check out a piece of jewelry integrating Stony Creek granite designed by Lisa Carlin Gerrity. Run out of dog treats on a walk to the town dock? You're covered. On the hunt for a house gift? See the driftwood trees and sailboats near the front window.

How about cilantro-roasted olive oil to drizzle on salads and pasta? Bingo. The two will be

hosting an olive oil tasting sponsored by Branford's Old Quarry Olive Oil Company next Thursday evening as a welcoming party to their new shop.

Given the wealth of goods at Seaside, given the visually arresting way they're displayed, it's

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At right, a painting by Christine Chiocchio, along with some nautical-themed bottle openers.



# Seaside

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hard to fathom that Chiocchio, an accomplished oil painter, and Herrick, formerly a physician-scientist, have sparse retail experience. Both are mothers of school-aged children; that's how they met, chairing PTA events.

But let's back up, to last October, when Chiocchio learned that the space beside Stony Creek Market had been vacated. And had a revelation.

From her house on Thimble Islands Road, she'd grown accustomed not just to the ebb and flow of the tides washing onto the rocky shoreline, but to the seasonal rhythms of weekend warriors, day trippers and Creekers peopling the sidewalks.

As an artist and a regular participant on the annual Shoreline Arts Trail open studios, she'd both experienced, and observed, how the picturesque fishing village inspired dramatic works of art in virtually every imaginable form, almost as if, she said on a recent afternoon in the lively atmosphere of the shop, "it in some way existed for artists to capture."

While a gallery in the village had displayed some of those pieces and the Stony Creek Museum provided a sense of the village's rich history, there was still a void.

"I saw a shop that could feature, quite literally, the best Stony Creek has to offer, both in an artistic sense and a practical one," she said.

She reached out to Herrick, just up the road in Sachem's Head. The two already knew they worked well together. The question was whether they could do the same on a project of a much larger scale in an area in which they had little experience.

"It's left brain, right



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Handmade bags and other items at Seaside Home and Gifts in Stony Creek.

brain," said Herrick, as she stood behind the counter leafing through inventory while Chiocchio studied the placement of a beaded handbag in the sun-lit space. "We complement each other. We enjoy each other's company. And, knock on wood, we both believe we're filling a need."

Not to mention a sensibility for what a gift shop should stock in a village like Stony Creek: impeccable taste for high quality products with broad appeal, from Carole Barber's Stony Creek Sea Salt Soap and organic teas to books by local authors, from seascapes hand-painted onto note cards to granite coasters, cheeseboards, and cutting boards, from the bath salts and body scrubs of Guilford's Renee Dixon to Chiocchio's bone carved jewelry, including seahorses, eagles and POW/MIA dog tags.

"It's like a treasure hunt," said Marta Resnikov of Branford, who was browsing among puzzles and mind benders in the kid's corner for a surprise

gift for her grandson. "I found what I was looking for and it's a half-hour later and I still want to see the



Seaside Home and Gifts is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Thursday to Monday through the winter.

oil paintings and ceramics."

At which moment a blast of January air accompanied another customer through the door.

"It's the perfect kind of shop to bring guests to," she mused to her daughter, looking through the front window at the deserted town beach. "Seems like just what this village has

been waiting for."

Stop in for the Olive Oil Tasting between 6:30 and 8:30 on Thursday, Jan. 29 at Seaside Home and Gifts, 172 Thimble Islands Road, Branford. The event is free.

For more information, call 203-208-4312 or visit [seasidehomeandgifts.com](http://seasidehomeandgifts.com). Seaside is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. from Thursday to Monday through the winter.