BY SHARI COOTE

ARKANSAS FLAG AND BANNER

"Welcome to Dreamland"

"You're a grand old flag, you're a high-flying flag..." "Welcome to Dreamland!" Perhaps the most patriotic place in Arkansas is directly beneath the most historic venue in the state. What could be more enticing?

At the corner of Ninth and State Streets in downtown Little Rock sits Taborian Hall. At one time this beautiful old building on the National Register of Historic Places, lovingly restored by entrepreneur Kerry McCoy, hosted some of the biggest names in entertainment—Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Redd Foxx, Louis Armstrong, and Sammy Davis Jr. Today the building houses the Arkansas Flag and Banner retail showrooms on the first floor, Kerry McCoy Enterprises on the second floor, and the ballroom, still in need of restoration, on the third.

Some people talk about things. Some people create things. Some people make a difference. Kerry McCoy has been making flags and banners in Little Rock for 40+ years, and she's been making more than a difference. She's been making a positive impact.

After completing fashion merchandising school in Dallas, the North Little Rock native went to work selling flags as a Betsy Ross Flag Girl in Dallas, as jobs in her chosen field were scarce. In 1975 she returned home, where she realized that many Little Rock businesses were lacking an American flag or needed a new one. With her total life savings of $400, Kerry started Arkansas Flag and Banner (now FlagandBanner.com) in 1975. Her nest egg paid for her business license, business cards, and order forms. Her willingness to knock on doors and make a pitch for her flags led to her success.

Over the years Arkansas Flag and Banner grew from a distribution company to a manufacturing company, and at one time the business employed twelve people in production. Today the business employs 22, but there are only four people producing custom and specialty flags and banners using a digital printing process which has replaced sewing. Others in the company are in marketing, technology, customer service, shipping, and office work, and FlagandBanner.com now offers over 22,000 products for purchase.

And the business has branched out in numerous directions—all under the umbrella of Kerry McCoy Enterprises. In addition to the flag and banner business, Kerry publishes a bi-annual magazine titled Brave. "We're not academicians, aspiring authors or magazine mogul wannabes," says Kerry. "We're just flag makers with some real-life stories to share about brave people."

There's also the weekly radio program on KABF 88.3 FM, "Up in Your Business with Kerry McCoy," which airs live each Friday at 2:00 p.m. and features Kerry interviewing successful, local entrepreneurs who share the stories of their successes and failures in the business world. Kerry says, "Week in, week out, people were asking me for advice on how I did something or other which contributed to the success of Flag and Banner. I started the radio program as a way to 'pay it forward' to our aspiring, young entrepreneurs."

And finally, there's the Dreamland Ballroom, and its non-profit corporation, Friends of Dreamland, which hopes to restore this culturally-significant venue to its original glory. All the big-name African-American performers came to Dreamland to entertain Little Rock's black community and soldiers from Camp Robinson. When McCoy purchased the dilapidated building in 1991 to house Arkansas Flag and Banner, she visualized the roofless, decaying ballroom hosting events again. Today there is a roof, but there's still much work to be done to restore this amazing space.

To that end the Friends of Dreamland will host the 8th Annual "Dancing into Dreamland," a cocktail party and dance contest to raise money for the ballroom restoration, on Friday, November 3, 2017, in the ballroom from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. This year's event will include a silent auction and local TV personality Craig O'Neill will introduce the dancers and provide lots of laughs for the audience between contestants.

Kerry McCoy admits, "Dreamland is the hardest thing I've done. It's going to take a lot of money (nearly $1,000,000 is estimated) to restore it, but before I die, I'm going to renovate Dreamland, bring it alive again." For information about "Dancing into Dreamland 2017," email friends@dreamlandballroom.org.

In the meantime, shop flagandbanner.com online or stop at Arkansas Flag and Banner, 800 W. Ninth Street, Little Rock, for all of your red, white, and blue decorations for the Fourth of July and your Arkansas Razorback paraphernalia this fall. ❖