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# Retailer Poggi Bonsi sees its wholesale efforts fall, but sales on the website are picking up

That's Italian

Puget Sound Business Journal (Seattle) - by [Kirsten Grind](#) Staff Writer

To hear the stories, you would think Keli DeRitis and Michelle Codd were running a travel company, not a Burien gift store with a quirky name.

The business partners and longtime friends are owners of **Poggi Bonsi** and they know your first question is: What the heck does that mean?

The store, pronounced “poe-jee bone-see” is named for an Italian town in Tuscany, and the origin of the name is one of many stories the owners have about their travels through Italy looking for unusual products.

All of those stories — including their unexpected dinner with an Italian count and their time with an endearing supplier named Fernando — can be found on their website ([www.poggibonsigifts.com](http://www.poggibonsigifts.com)) on a new blog launched several months ago.

It's part of the European import company's recent overhaul of its website, part of its effort to boost sales across the country and the world, particularly at a time when retailers everywhere are suffering through a down economy.

“We've had some really interesting things happen to us,” said DeRitis about their travels.



Photo: Marcus R. Donner

Keli DeRitis and Michelle Codd are owners of Poggi Bonsi, which has two stores just doors apart in Burien.

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The partners actually run two stores — the original store of the same name in Burien’s historic district and a kitchenware store called **Cucina** located two doors down, both filled to the brim with Italian imports and eccentricities from other countries. Together, the two businesses saw sales of about \$1 million last year.

Among the items for sale: intricately painted ceramics of all shapes and sizes, cheese graters and spoons topped by Parisian women, Irish cookbooks and hand-carved olive wood serving platters. That last item, said DeRitis, is a best-seller.

The business was founded in 2001 initially as a wholesale supplier of imports and a corporate gift company after DeRitis and her family returned from an Italian vacation enamored of the country.

It was on that trip that she kept getting lost and the only sign she could find pointed toward Poggibonsi, which she later decided was a fitting name for the business.

DeRitis then roped Codd, with a background in retail display, into her business plan. The two have been friends for about 14 years — since their oldest children went to preschool together.

“Michelle said, ‘I have visions of my basement being full of dipping bowls’ and eventually it was full of dipping bowls,” said DeRitis.

The business grew first into a tiny 300-square-foot location in Burien and then into a larger, 900-square-foot store nearby. In 2005, DeRitis and Codd opened Cucina to focus on kitchen imports.

They have gradually grown their sales every year from about \$50,000 annually at the start.

But now they’re bumping heads with the down economy, which has largely affected the company’s wholesale business, said DeRitis. Wholesale used to represent about 15 percent of the company’s sales and now it’s less than 10 percent.

That’s one of the reasons why the partners have showered so much attention on their website — representing about 20 percent of their total sales.

“We are in Burien — there are only so many houses here and how many Italian ceramics can they have?” Codd said.

DeRitis, who has a background in graphic design, overhauled the website herself, a feat that took hours of time for both partners. By all accounts, it’s paid off. The website has seen a 50 percent increase in

**traffic to about 10,000 hits a month since it re-launched in April.**

**Wealthy international shoppers taking advantage of the devalued dollar are leading the increase in visitors. The business recently filled a large order from Dubai.**

**In addition, the partners have diversified their product line, so they're not just carrying high-end goods.**

**"We try to look for the most unique thing that we don't see here," said Codd.**

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