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New owners continue Wine Shop tradition

Like past Wine Shop of Reading tastings, patrons swirled wine in their glasses and nibbled on cheese. Bottles of merlot and chardonnay emptied as customers mingled and filled up boxes with their selections. But one thing was very different about the shop's eighth annual Wine Fest on Saturday: new owners Beena and PJ Patel.

"Once a year people are looking for something special before the holidays," said Beena, explaining why she and her husband PJ decided to continue the yearly tradition.

The event showcased 24 wines from different regions, divided into four tasting stations. Customers also sampled chocolate from Ecuador and cheeses produced as close as New England and as far away as Europe.

The new owners took over the store in March, in the middle of a major renovation of the surrounding downtown area. Beena expressed relief that the construction, which included revamped sidewalks and restructuring a nearby busy intersection, finally wrapped up last month.

"The timeframe was too long. Customers need to know it's done," she said. The Wine Fest brought a full house to the shop and she said customers so far seem to approve of the upgrades to downtown.

Beena, who previously worked in electrical engineering and investment services for banking, cites her Indian culture and family support as helping the venture succeed. "It's a family-oriented business," she said, adding that her two children and her husband's parents are involved.

So how did she come to run the Wine Shop? "I wanted to do something different, have a new adventure."