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# TIVERTON *FOUR* CORNERS

A sleepy corner of Rhode  
Island buzzing with shops,  
galleries and eateries

Story by Linda Laban  
Photos by Christine Peterson



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Groundswell Garden + Home is a cut above the average garden shop; The vast porch at Groundswell Cafe + Bakery is a great spot to hang out on on a rainy summer day; Groundswell Table + Provisions opened this spring.





Pulling off Route 24 in Tiverton and heading south down 77, an unremarkable stretch of roadway soon winds past Nannaquaket Pond, which is fed by gorgeous Mount Hope Bay, and is dotted with boats and flanked by houses with their green-green lawns that reach down to the twinkling blue surface. It's a picture-perfect Rhode Island coastal scene.

Driving on southward, the water disappears from view and the scene becomes more rural — one of greenery and open land. Even farmland. Before winter's still whiteness, through spring, summer and fall, this stretch is gloriously alive with colors: from the effervescent pale green of spring's bursting buds to the deep greens of summer maturity, and then onto all the lovely colors of fall for the last hurrah of the growing season.

An hour's drive south-slightly-east of Worcester, and half an hour north-slightly-east of Newport, Tiverton stretches between Fall River, in Massachusetts to the north, and Little Compton, its Rhode Island neighbor to the south. It is a part of Newport County.

Historically, the area was inhabited by the Pocasset Tribe, which was among the signees of the Treaty of Plymouth in 1621. Tiverton became part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony before being officially surrendered to Rhode Island in 1747. It is named for a hamlet in Devon in England's bucolic southwest.

One can feel a connection with its namesake on this quiet, peaceful stretch



The Soule-Seabury House at 3852 Main Road houses the law offices of Richard S. Humphrey and the Four Corners Arts Center

of road with seemingly "nothing going on." Then, Route 77 or Main Street as it has become, passes by a shaded old cemetery and a sign introducing Tiverton Four Corners Historic District. Neither of which prepares the visitor for the burst of vibrant commercial life that unfolds shortly after that graveyard where much of the town's past lies.

Tiverton Four Corners unfolds persistently as around 30 businesses reveal themselves just past the absolutely adorable little Union Public Library, which dates to 1868. (Union Public Library is open Tuesdays and Saturday mornings.) Next to the library is the self-explanatory The Cheese Wheel Village Market, which sells cheeses from all over the world, as well as some local products. Then one arrives at the intersection that gives the district its name.

Pertinently situated on one corner is a handsome old two-story Victorian with a mansard roof and cupola whose sign reads Groundswell Cafe + Bakery. The place is buzzing with diners taking in the sunshine while eating lunch on the two-sided wraparound porch. A waitress carries a tray bearing a bottle of rosé and some glasses to a trio of gentlemen. Nearby, a man chugs coffee while his dog patiently waits, tied to a chair, sniffing the food flavoring the air. Inside, a group gathers at the communal marble tables, and duos relax in the window corner seating. A steady trickle of customers heads to the counter where pastries and fresh-baked loaves of bread are displayed, and a menu offers breakfast dishes and, at this afternoon hour, sand-

wiches and salads.

Something of a Four Corners lynchpin, the building housing the café was originally the A. P. White Store, built in 1875 as a general store by Mayflower descendant Andrew Peregrine White. Andrew and his brother Charles Henry White operated the nearby A.P. White & Bro. mill complex, located at the tellingly named Mill Pond at the southern end of Four Corners.

Tiverton Four Corners Historic District, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, spreads out along each branch of the crossroads and occupies 50 acres in all. According to the National Register of Historic Places, the building housing Groundswell, which sits on the northwest corner, was designed for "commercial use on the first floor with living space above."

"That building has been providing for the community since the 1870s," says Groundswell's owner David Fierabend. "It's been a hardware store, clothing store, a general store, and a café."

The register also details the three other Four Corners cornerstones, so to speak, including the Chace-Cory House, built around 1730 on the southeast corner by a Mr. Chace, who was involved in the whaling trade. It was then bought by Andrew Cory, also a whaling captain. The house was acquired by the Tiverton Historical Society in 1964 and serves as its headquarters. The Chace-Cory House is open on Sunday afternoons, 2-4:30 p.m., June through Labor Day for guided tours. A small fee is charged.





On the southwest corner, the Arnold Smith House at 3895 Main Road was built around 1750, probably as a store or school. The Soule-Seabury House was built circa 1770 on the northwest corner, "by Abner Soule, blacksmith, Revolutionary man, and descendant of George Soule of the Mayflower," according to the historic register.

What's what and where's where, and who put them there, can be traced at the village's website: [www.tivertonfourcorners.com](http://www.tivertonfourcorners.com)

So, out of this 18th-century village of wily entrepreneurs grew this 21st-century hidden hotspot for relaxing recreational shopping. The perfect place for holiday shopping! Still, the array of stores and galleries does not feel like a commercial center, even if it is. It's far more artful.

Amongst the shops and art galleries, one can't help but notice a preponderance of law offices. The Soule-Seabury House at 3852 Main Road is now the Law Offices of Richard S. Humphrey and the Four Corners Arts Center, which has a sculpture garden.

Carmen & Ginger Vintage Goods, which has all sorts of cute bric-a-brac, occupies the Benjamin F. Seabury House, built around 1840 at 3842 Main Road. It was the town library during the 19th century. Benjamin was the son of the wealthy Cornelius.

At 3841 Main Road is the Four Corners Grille, a single-story cedar-shingled bungalow built in 1940, which serves an American casual menu of burgers and pastas, and chowder and scrod.

The large barn-like shingled building housing The Cottage at Four Corners at 3847 Main Road was originally a gas station built in the 1940s and converted to a retail store in the 1980s. The concrete block structure of the gas station is encased by shingled walls.

At 3845 Main, Salt sells coastal casual clothing; while among Lou Lou's Decor's gorgeous house wares, including embroidered dachshunds, one can spill a couple hundred bucks on a glamorous handmade hat.

Nothing at Four Corners is quite as rat packishly endearing as Peter's Attic on Neck Road. The building houses Patina Studio, Coogan Glass & Steel Works, Epilogues and Artemis, and is itself a haven of antiques, old furniture, ephemera and what some folks might call junk. Good junk, though: an ancient helicopter and a gyrocopter stand among the yard's wilding plants.

The newest resident at the Corners is Dina Doyle, an artist who paints women



**ABOVE:** An array of jeweled rings at Tiffany Peay Healing Arts. **TOP:** Jeweler Hannah Soares shows off a necklace at the shop, which has been in Tiverton for 15 years.

in beguilingly distorted poses of elegant strength. She opened Dina Doyle Fine Art at 3848 Main this summer as both a studio where she works, and also as a gallery for other Rhode Island artists. Doyle, a RISD grad, told me she had moved to the area with her husband to live the coastal life after several years in New York City.

Neighboring Doyle's studio, Studio by the Sea is where Peter Tirpaeck has been creating bespoke and unique jewelry, including belt buckles, for 30 years. He estimates he's made about 1,200 buckles. Along with mending broken jewelry, too, he enjoys turning not-so-loved heirloom pieces into something descendants will actually love to wear!

Tiffany Peay is another New York transplant. After spending 10 years in Manhattan working in the jewelry business, she set up her studio and shop, Tiffany Peay Jewelry, right on Main Street. She has been here for 15 years.

Peay advised that businesses at Four Corners are open daily from spring through fall, but days and times shorten during the colder months. It gets a little

quiet after the holidays and some stores and galleries will close; but not all. Fierabend opened the Groundswell café in November 2020, at the height of the pandemic. "We didn't know what it would be like so we just jumped straight in," he said. "It was very well received, we had a line out of the door."

To keep people safely distanced, firepits were set up in the parking lot. It was such a hit, firepits continue to be a winter feature.

Just after buying the A.P. White building, another opportunity cropped up: "We saw the house across the street was for sale. We thought we'd buy it as a place to live, but then living across the street from 'work' would take away the fun part of doing this. So it became the home store," Fierabend said.

Now Groundswell Garden + Home, that house was the Arnold Smith House. Neighboring Peter's Attic (and a law office), Groundswell Garden + Home is not like any normal garden center. Instead of sad looking dying plants, thoughtful staging creates a verdant wonderland to wander in the garden. Gentle music plays in one spot. Inside the café, the music was jazz and the voice of Sinatra promising the best is yet to come; out here, it's more the pan flute type — natural, ethnic and very fitting: Very Zen.

Curation inside the old Smith house is also enticing. An intoxicating scent draws one to a room with a sizable hearth (that might've been used for cooking in olden times) that is filled with handmade soaps, potions and unguents. Scents of rose, lavender, lily and verbena collect in the air.

Fierabend and his partner did buy a home nearby and then when the store on the other side of Groundswell Café became vacant last year, they snapped that up. After renovating, it opened this spring as Groundswell Table + Provisions.

There's cookware and dinnerware and silverware — some antique. This is where you go to buy the 1800s French gravy boat you always wanted. In the bar room upstairs, amongst shakers and stirrers, is the Hawthorne that you never knew you needed until you saw this one.

Fierabend, founder and a principal of Groundswell Design Group in Philadelphia (and Detroit), lives the dual life of city and coast. Coast might be winning.

"When we bought the café we just fell in love with it the moment we turned the key in the door on the first day," Fierabend recalled. "We lived in Tiverton through the COVID crisis and we became deeply connected to it." ■