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## Get looped in on the South Loop

*Ellen Warren, Shopping Adviser*

If your travels take you anywhere close to downtown, you can't miss the explosion going on in the South Loop. An explosion of condos, I mean.

Stand in the parking lot of the Jewel at Wabash Avenue and Roosevelt Road and gaze south. You'll see what I mean. Construction cranes are everywhere and completed high-rises seem to have sprouted overnight from what used to be pretty much of a wasteland.

So the inquiring shopper wants to know: What about the stores? What's happening retail-wise south of Roosevelt Road?

The good news is that it's percolating. We're not talking Lincoln Park, Bucktown and the other North Side boutique-lined hot spots, but there are signs of life and some surprising jewels, many of them owned and operated by African-American entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, if you're lucky, you can still find a metered parking spot on the street, which is no small thing for all of us who have spent too much time praying for a parking miracle on Damen or Armitage Avenues.

If you're a passionate shopper like I am, you'll want to be one of the early adopters. So here's a glimpse of some of the stores you'll find just a healthy stroll from the heart of downtown.

Even if you don't knit, check out Knitwerks, the yarn shop and boutique at 1934 S. Wabash Ave. (312-949-9276, knitwerks.net). Owner Cherrl Harmon was a South Loop pioneer when she moved to the neighborhood 14 years ago, so when she decided to open her first shop nine months ago, there was no doubt that she wanted to locate here.

When I asked her what makes her shop special, she didn't have to think about it: "Me!" And how. Harmon is so passionate about knitting that she happily shows off the tattoo -- a ball of yarn and knitting needles -- high on her left arm. At Knitwerks, you can buy the fixings for a scarf or sweater but, unlike most knitting shops, you can also buy the garments themselves, hand-knit by Harmon.

"I can teach you how to knit it or sell it to you." One example, a pretty scarf that will cost you \$26 in yarn, is \$90 if you buy it lovingly already

complete and ready to wear. She does custom hand-knit work too. Bring in your pattern and ask.

And, if you love to knit, or want to learn, sign up for classes or think about coming by for her free Friday Night Knitting Club between 5 and 8 p.m.

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