

# New location, new owners, same Cupboard service and quality

By Janet S. Lee

Three locations, three different owners, a tradition of personal service for 47 years. But as Jacque Tharpe, the originator of The Cupboard, relates, there wasn't a grand scheme or any idea the shop would still be thriving in the 21st century.

"I just needed a nice birthday present, but there was nowhere in Clinton then to buy one. I had to go seek out a gift store in Jackson, which I thought was ridiculous," said Tharpe.

That was November 1971. Jacque Tharpe and mother, Maycel Martin, decided to open a gift shop, though they had absolutely no retail experience. Tharpe's family had moved to Clinton in the 1960s to open College Cleaners, but mother and daughter had no idea of how to establish or manage a gift shop.

As Tharpe remembers, "We didn't know how to do anything. I didn't know you went to market to buy things for a gift shop and didn't know how to price items. But I was young, ignorant and excited. My father let us put the gifts in a small corner of the laundromat he had on Clinton Boulevard, and that's where it all started."

From that humble beginning, the gift shop thrived and occupied more space, at 305 Clinton Boulevard. When Mrs. Martin retired after ten years, Tharpe needed a friend, a sounding board, someone who would be as close as family. She found that person in Cindi Brown.

With a laugh, Tharpe dryly comments, "When you start a business,



Special to The Clinton Courier

The Clinton Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Clinton recently sponsored a Ribbon Cutting/Red Carpet Roll-out ceremony for The Cupboard. Owners Tara Lytal, Heather Broadwater and Linda Lytal were joined by Chamber and Main Street board members, Chamber ambassadors, City officials, family and friends. For more information, call 601-924-5245.



there's no exit plan.

Cindi was in the right place at the right time for me. She came in one day after my mother had left the business and found out I needed someone to continue what we had started. Fortunately, she agreed to come work with me."

Beginning in 1982, it turned out to be an ideal melding of skills and a mutually advantageous relationship. In 1992, they became equal partners after Brown finished her interior design degree from Mississippi College. As both Tharpe and Brown agree, it also began what can only be called "the sisterhood of The Cupboard girls."

That sisterhood involves a close group of women, some of whom

work fulltime, some part-time, to ensure the personal touch that has always been the distinguishing feature of the local gift shop. Borrowing a tagline from a popular television comedy, The Cupboard prides itself as the place where "everybody knows your name."

But the family connection was and still is a major underlying thread that defines the business and makes it unique. The two Lytal girls, Tara and Heather, have lived in Clinton their entire lives and can both vividly recall riding their bicycles from their home in the Lakeview area, carefully parking those bikes near the railroad tracks, and walking to The Cupboard on Clinton Boulevard to visit and to shop. They browsed carefully, then

purchased all their family birthday and Christmas gifts from The Cupboard, where they felt at home, even as young customers.

Tara would eventually find herself in design classes with Cindi Brown at MC. They discovered they had a similar interest in good design and accessories that would define a given style. It was a serendipitous progression that Tara would join the business that had so captivated her as a child. For thirteen years, Tara worked at The Cupboard, learning to deal with a variety of customers who might want a distinctive gift for themselves, a local bride, or a favorite teacher.

When Tharpe decided to retire from the gift shop she had created, she

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