

Celebrating Mothers

Siblings continue 120+ year clothing tradition online

The slideshow on the E.T. Reavis and Son website homepage offers a brief history of the still family-owned and operated Dresden clothing store:

"Pap" E.T. Reavis settled in Dresden in 1890 and opened his clothing store in 1895. Every generation of the Reavis family has worked in the family business. And, though the name has been retained, the "son" has become sisters Martha, Carol and brother Tom, and the "store" is now more online sales than those exiting the door facing the Court Square.

Martha Killebrew, Carol Moore, and Tom Reavis grew up in the corner "brick and mortar" version of the clothing establishment that, though still open for in-store traffic, looks a bit more like a warehouse ... which it is.

"Sounds better when we call it a warehouse," laughingly commented Tom as Carol explained the transformation of the business that caters to those needing hard-to-find clothing items like oversized overalls.

"We know where everything is, if you can believe that," Carol added as she looked around the full-to-overflowing inventory of neatly stacked shirts, sleepwear and work pants taking over what appears to be every available inch of the tables, shelves and racks in the family's store.

What led to the online presence that now constitutes more than half the sales is part of the family folklore.

Tom tells the story of the new days of the internet when little was known about what it was or would become. He and his wife, who worked at a nearby bank, were in search of Topps baseball cards, which were an annual gift to their son. However, for reasons unknown, none of the usual suppliers had the boxed sets. Having heard something of the potential of computer searches, Tom suggested his wife use her "new toy" at the bank - a computer with online access - and see what she could find. They plugged in Topps and then, when asked for a zip code, provided



Carol Moore, Martha Killebrew and Tom Reavis continue the 123-year-old family business online and on the Court Square in Dresden.

it as well. Soon, they learned that a shop in nearby Martin had what they needed.

"I told her then, 'This changes everything,'" said Tom, and, in 2000, the historic Dresden shop unveiled its first website. Now, the three siblings spend their afternoons filling orders and taking care of the occasional customer who chooses to look through the many racks of possibilities.

Carol and Martha represent yet another example of how the respected establishment stays contemporary. They proudly proclaim themselves to be "working grandmothers" with cell phones at the ready to do whatever pickups or caregiving is required with their four younger grandchildren (two are young adults).

Retired teachers, the two had a model of working and caregiving in their mother. She had originally come to Dresden as a 4-H representative but, due to regulations at the time, had to quit once she married their father. Family caretaking of children

and parents meant she didn't return to the workforce until the siblings were in high school. But she worked by her husband's side until his death in 1977 and then alongside her children as an active part of the store until her death in 1988.

"Mom died at 63," said Carol. "She was here on Saturday and on life support on Monday."

Watching their young widowed mother carry on the family business inspired the siblings who acknowledge that they almost take for granted the fact that they - as brother and sisters - have found a way to continue to call the store home. They laugh as they tell of Christmases spent at the store until the last-minute release when they could finally go home and wrap their own gifts.

They list loyalty, dedication, being responsible and love for family as part of the inheritance they received from their parents.

"You've got to love your family if you are going to be in business with them," said Carol. "The love of family was instilled in us."

That love keeps them coming in each day to meet the demands of carrying on a family business - something Martha says both her grandparents and parents would be "delighted to see."

"They might not agree with all we've done though," she added.

At which Tom interjects, "Pap would! He'd love that we've tried new things."

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