

Celebrating Mothers

Special Occasions makes every season special

Elizabeth Hutchins, owner of Special Occasions, doesn't speak in terms of years when referencing how long the formal wear shop has been located in Greenfield. She talks of "prom seasons." Now in her fourth "season" in town and third at the Front Street location, she attracts customers from across West Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri.

Hutchins got into the dress, shoes, accessory and tuxedo business with a simple offer of help to her mother-in-law Lydia Hubble. Hubble began the operation in Milan in 1995 and three years ago when she retired, she handed it over to Hutchins, who has now added monogramming, heat transfers and casual clothes to the product line.

Looking ahead, Hutchins sees the day when she, too, will hand off the business to her daughter Madison Reynolds. Granddaughter Reagan, at 10 years of age, is already assisting both mom and grandmother as she practices merchandising in the store windows and modeling and marketing the casual clothes to friends. When they compliment her attire, she insists they should "come to Gigi's store" and get one of their own.

Whether "business owner" is the kind of legacy Hutchins wants to leave her loved ones is as ever-changing as girls' tastes in gowns.

"One day it's like 'don't get into it,'" admitted Hutchins. "The next day it's all about the leniency it provides. It's not like I'm going to call in sick because who is it going to hurt but me? On the flip side, if you need to close early, you put a note on the door and on Facebook and you're gone."

Having previously worked in administration for a large company, the allure of flexibility and being the boss is winning out in the sometimes question mark that is store ownership.

What is not in question is the importance Hutchins and Reynolds both place on family. Reynolds remembers working Saturdays during school years and has returned to help in the store at her mom's request. Reagan has her own coloring station set up by the cash register when she and 7-year-old brother Tyler get dropped at the front door each day after school.

Assisting mothers and daughters in prom and wedding dress purchases means Hutchins gets to see them

at their best and, at times, their worst. Just as she tries to keep only one copy of items in the store to avoid duplication, she tries to remember that while sometimes "polar opposites," the mothers and daughters are individual and unique.

Keeping things in perspective helps when keeping the business in the family, said Hutchins. Referring to how she and her mother-in-law operated and how she and her daughter now function, she said she remembers how she started with thinking, "When I'm at work, you're my boss. At home, you're my mother-in-law." That wisdom is one she continues with her own daughter.

Though there are times when she says the "business owns you rather than you own the business," the rapid pace of orders, adjustments, customer care, and researching what's next seems a natural fit for Hutchins. For Reynolds, it's not so much about the gowns and formality - she's more into comfort clothes as the mom of two - but she does enjoy helping other young women "dress up" for their turn at being "Cinderella."

Which suggests mother and daughter have many "prom seasons" ahead.



Elizabeth Hutchins, owner of Special Occasions in Greenfield, receives "marketing and merchandising" assistance from granddaughter Reagan Reynolds.



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