

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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Fix-it Businesses Boom by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

In tough times, some people find that the best place to find something to wear is in their closet. As customers cut back on the purchase of new clothing, many are opting to extend the life of their current wardrobe. This could mean an update, alteration, or repair. Regardless, it means that fix-it businesses are busier than ever.

Dorothy Lindenbeck, owner of Dorothy's Custom Sewing and Alterations, 520 Greene Ave., Allouez, is one of the businesses benefiting from the trend. She has seen sales climb and is looking at a record year. In fact, she closes her doors to the public one-day a week just so she can work without interruption.

A talented seamstress, Lindenbeck started sewing at age 12. After learning sewing in home economics class, she fell in love with the craft and decided to make it her career. She held management positions at So-Fro Fabrics, Prange's, and Younkers. After leaving retail, she decided it was time to go out on her own and opened Dorothy's Custom Sewing and Alterations in February 1997.

"When I found my first location and it was only two blocks from my home, I took that as a sign that it was meant to be," Lindenbeck recalled.

Although she hadn't owned a business before, it wasn't new to her husband, Horst. He owned the Custom Tailor Shop on Pine Street in Green Bay for 45 years. Now retired, Horst works four days a week at his wife's shop. She noted, "My husband has always been there for support. And now I couldn't do it without him. If he decides to really retire, I will have to hire someone to help."

With business booming, Lindenbeck monitors the amount of work she takes. As people fix the old rather than buying new, the volume of business continues to grow and she is considering hiring additional seamstresses.

"A lot of people have commented that it is less expensive to refurbish an older garment than to buy new, especially if it's something they really like to wear," Lindenbeck explained. "And if it is really good quality, it is more than worth the price."

Lindenbeck says that customers are cleaning out their closets and resurrecting old items. That can mean an alteration, especially for those who have lost weight.

"Those who are losing weight (aren't we all trying?) would rather have the same garment taken in several times than spend money on another new one that won't fit in a couple of months anyway," she said.

Lindenbeck is happy to help. She says that no matter how busy she is, there is nothing she'd rather do.

She noted, "From the very first day I thought about doing this, everything just fell into place, like it was meant to be. The business has continued to grow every year. There are a lot of man hours sometimes, like now, but I wouldn't trade my profession for anything!"

If you'd like to learn more about starting a business, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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