

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

"We looked at Corby as part of our historical fabric." Belleville and District Chamber of Commerce manager Ron Broadbridge, on the closure.

**After losing Corby job**

# Woman pieces together a shattered dream

In a small warehouse on Highway 62, Kelly Cooper is picking up the pieces of her shattered life.

"I was just starting to get my life back on track again," said Cooper, 30, shaking her head. "I moved here to start a new life and things were just starting to go well."

Cooper pauses and looks around her new business office — remembering a time when she had it all.

"I'd just finished building a house after moving here to start a new life," said Cooper.

"I had a steady job with Corby Distilleries and worked with good people," she said, her voice faintly faltering.

Kelly Cooper lived a life of which dreams were made.

Things couldn't have been better.

But then something went wrong.

Cooper's livelihood — along with her perfect life — shattered last May when Corby decided to close its 132-year-old Belleville-area shop.

"It was a complete shock, I was just devastated," said Cooper.

Luckily, time helped heal Cooper's wounds. Refusing to abandon her dreams, Cooper was determined to start again.

Thus, Costume Castle, Cooper's business brainchild, was born.

These days, Cooper's costume business is thriving under her dogged determination and never-say-die attitude.

With Halloween just around the corner, Cooper's hoping would-be renters will flock to her new shop.

Filled with more than 200 costumes of different sizes and colors, it's a Halloween haven.

Suddenly the cruel blow dealt by Corby seemed like a minor scrape.

Four fellow employees have also opened new businesses.

Still, it's sad to see good things end.

"A lot of people have left already," said Cooper, who's cleaning up house with Corby until the end of October. "But it will be sad to see everyone I knew leave."

"Maybe this is a blessing in disguise."



Photo by Jeff McInito

Kelly Cooper hopes things look up for her now.

# Distillery becomes place of bittersweet memories

Chester Thompson walks slowly through Corby Distilleries — bittersweet steps down memory lane.

Thompson, his hands tucked into his pockets, is bidding a final farewell to a special business and a livelihood gone by.

"There was a lot of good memories here," said Thompson, 42. "I'd hoped to retire here." It's funny but this was like a place to work, it wasn't like a job."

When Corby Distilleries finally shuts its doors later this month, 132 years of tradition will fade into Belleville history.

Company brass aren't sure what their next step is — but everyone knows nothing will ever be the same again.

And there's more at stake here than just tradition.

About 180 employees — many of Thompson's life-long friends — have been pushed out the door and rudely thrust on the unemployment line.

Workers who've carried on Corby Distilleries' proud tradition for most of their lives must start all over.

Thompson is proud he had a hand in that special heritage, but even the affable father of two can't hide his disenchantment.

"I feel kind of disappointed because I really enjoyed working here, he said. "I'll miss that more than the job."

In November, Thompson would've celebrated his 15th anniversary with Corby's.

Sadly, Thompson won't mark the milestone. Instead, he'll be pounding the pavement — knowing his next paycheque won't likely equal his \$33,000 annual salary once his severance package runs dry.

"I guess you just have to get on with your life, you've got to find something else to do," he said. "I'm mad they took my job away, but they don't deal with people they (Corby) deal with the bottom line."

During Thompson's walk through the Corby-ville plant, he frequently stopped and talked to former fellow employees.

Some, like Tom Tannahill, remain bitter four months after the company's decision.

"I still don't think they should've shut the place

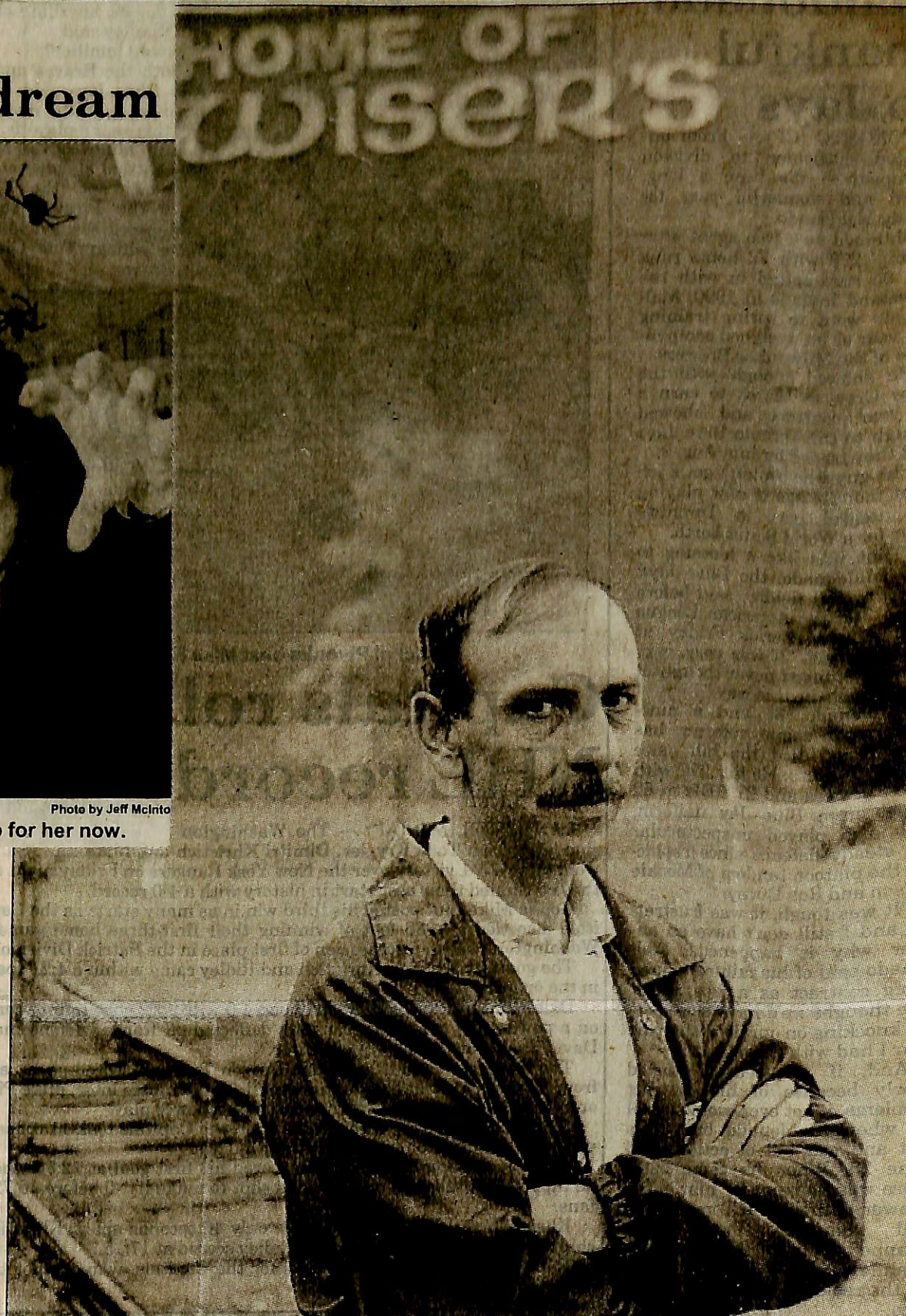


Photo by Frank O'Connor

Chester Thompson has memories of Corby; they're both good and bad.