

Planning for success

Erin storeowner shows the way

BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

For Deborah Shortill, the owner of a men and women's clothing store in Erin, the motto she lives by daily is "planning, planning, planning." When it comes to running a business, she believes any investment made in achieving long-term goals is worth it.

Ms. Shortill, who owns Hannah's Closet at 116 Main Street, says establishing a business plan is something she would also recommend to other entrepreneurs. It may take a lot of work, but she says the effort will pay off in the long run. As part of her business vision, she identified a number of goals, including owning her own commercial property and finding a larger premises for her store.



Deborah Shortill, the owner of Hannah's Closet in Erin, prides herself on offering her customers personalized service when they come to shop for men and women's clothing at her business in Erin.

Ms. Shortill not only found a new location for her business at 116 Main Street, but she also incorporated a design into the construction plans that maximizes the use of available retail space. This summer, the Retail Council of Canada recognized her innovative design when Hannah's Closet was selected as a finalist for the council's 2004 excellence in retailing awards. The store was one of two finalists chosen from across Canada under the retail store design and layout category. As noted by the council,

the women and men's clothier "turned a large, derelict space into a fresh, inviting store...even with the general downturn of the economy in Erin."

Many businesses on Erin's Main Street suffered in 2002 and in the early part of 2003 during road reconstruction on the village's main thoroughfare. In spite of the poor road conditions, Hannah's Closet opened at its newest location and the store managed to post a 56 per cent increase in sales.

Ms. Shortill credits her business plan with making much of her success possible. A few years ago, the Erin Township resident went to the Guelph Enterprise Centre, which provides a service offered by the Ontario government for entrepreneurs. Over a three-month period, she worked out a detailed business plan at the centre. And she says the plan enabled her to identify her business goals. "The benefit of the business plan is that you know where you are going. Nobody gets there without knowing where they want to go."

For her, finding a larger store with more retail space was important. In 1990, when she first opened her business at 72 Main Street she only had 750 square feet of retail space. The store then relocated to 74 Main Street to larger premises. But by the spring of 2002 she was once again considering another move to accommodate a steadily increasing number of customers at her store.

On the last day of February in 2003, Hannah's Closet officially opened at 116 Main Street. With even more retail space available - a total of 3,000 square feet - she was able to meet the growing needs of her customers. But at the same time, she fulfilled a dream of owning her own commercial property. Through the Scotia Bank, she arranged financing to purchase the site for her new store. She says she wanted to have an asset "with an eye to retirement," but there was something else she was after as well. A sense of community and love of her hometown had driven her to want to make an investment in Erin itself. "You have more control and more responsibility, but with that comes a sense of achievement and enrichment that translates into your daily life and I also think it's a benefit to my customers because they feel secure in their purchases. They are buying from a retailer that they

can feel proud of."

The property she purchased at 116 Main Street was in "terrible condition" as she recalls. The building, which had been the site of Rainbow Pizza, needed a lot of work and she says the whole process of renovating the premises took its toll.

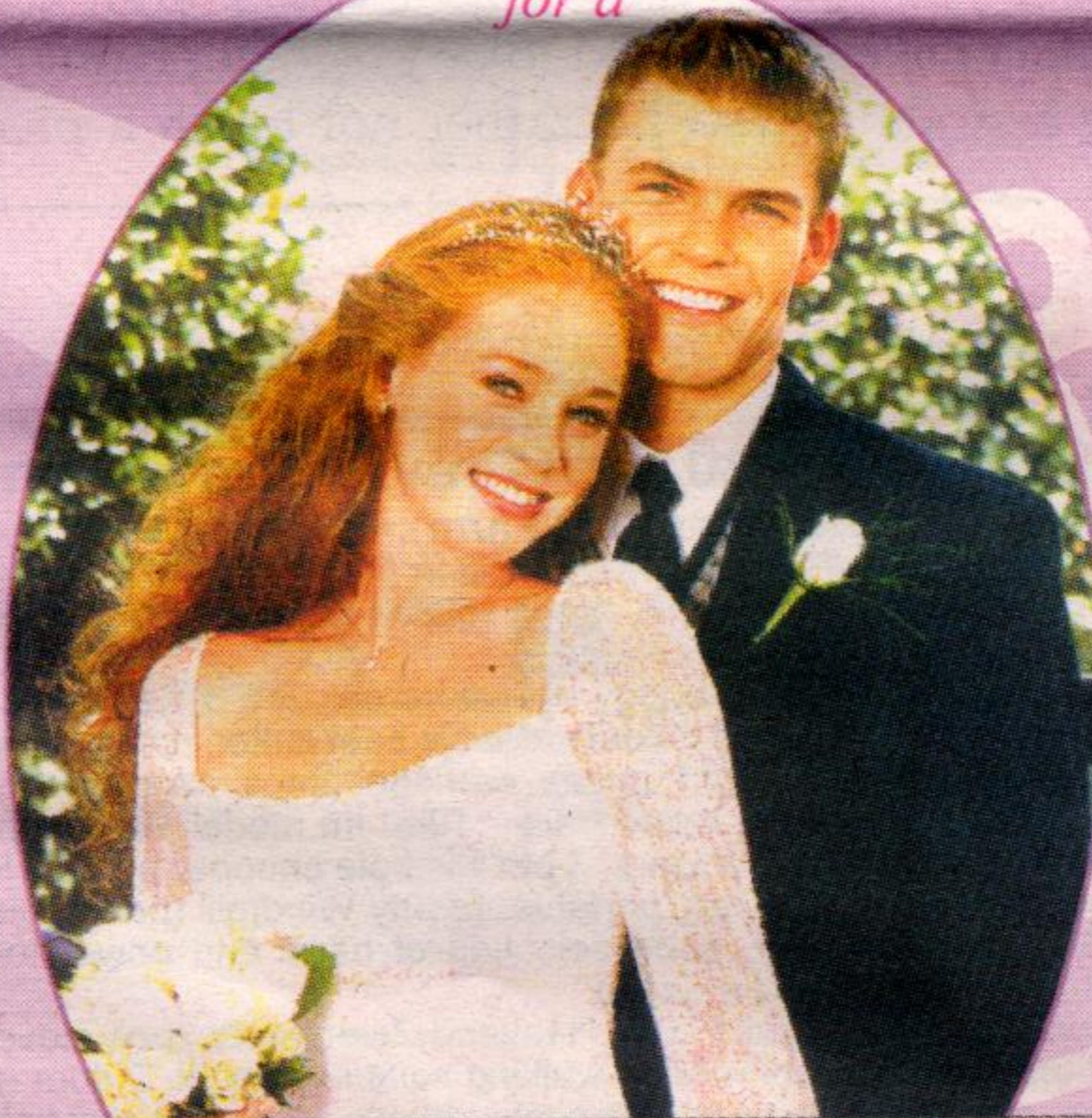
Today, when you walk into the store you'll probably notice the high ceilings, the polished wooden floors, the smell of scented candles, the beautiful clothing. What you may not see is the creative use of retail space and the innovative design. A room at the back of Hannah's Closet provides a storage area to keep extra merchandise so the racks aren't "jam packed" with clothes as Ms. Shortill says. There's a trap door built into the floor in the same room where cardboard boxes can be stored before they're taken for recycling. That way boxes are kept out of the way leaving more available space. A closet behind the front desk serves several purposes as a storage space for gift-wrapping materials, hangers and office supplies. An antique hayloft ladder is used to display scarves while extra accessories such as jewellery are kept in a tall, wooden cupboard.

Selling clothes is the focus of Ms. Shortill's business. But building a long-term relationship with her customers is also something that holds importance for her. The store's name underlines what she values not only as a businessperson, but also as an individual. She says she decided to name the store Hannah after a great aunt of hers as a way to commemorate her memory. Ms. Shortill remembers her relative as someone who always "strove to make people feel good about themselves," and it's that same spirit that forms the guiding philosophy behind her relationship with her customers. She says it's her goal to make "people feel good...one person at a time."



Hannah's Closet carries a wide variety of clothing, as well as an assortment of other items, including accessories, to choose from at the store.

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