

If canvas is you then Kettle Creek is for you

Kettle Creek Canvas is the creation of Mellanie Stephens and Jim Sorrenti, two Port Stanley natives. Stephens, who left the sticks to see the world, saw it from a variety of off-beat jobs including a stint in a lumber camp, and then decided that, if she were going to make it anywhere, it might as well be her hometown. Three years ago, she and Sorrenti rented part of an old house and opened a store specializing in custom-made canvas bags for sailors, with Stephens doing all the sewing. She also sewed "some canvas clothes so it wouldn't seem so empty." The clothing, simple designs made from heavy cotton, proved to be more popular than the bags. In the first year, they did \$68,000 in business. After spending some time working out of temporary quarters, including a room in a hotel and the building housing the local pinball parlor, they moved into their present location. With a thriving cottage industry of sewers and an expanding network of Kettle Creek stores, their business last year was up to \$359,000.

Today, there are Kettle Creek Canvas Co. stores in Port Stanley, London, Kitchener, St. Catharines, Sarnia, Ottawa, Burlington,

Cobourg, Toronto, and Midland which are the exclusive outlets for the clothing. The designs by David MacDonnell (more local talent, from London's Fanshawe College) tend toward a simple, nautical look—brightly colored drawstring pants and fishermen-style smocks, as well as more standard shirts and jackets—and sales this year should top \$2-million. In the unlikely role of fashion centre, Port Stanley is booming again.

The company employs about 40 people, 24 of whom work on the garments by hand in their homes. The cloth is pre-cut, the edges finished by machines in the shop, and the pieces sorted into bundles, each representing one article of clothing. Every morning the sewers come into the shop and pick up their bundles, which they return as finished articles in the evening.

Many of the sewers are new immigrants, whose language problems make it difficult to join the mainstream workforce. Sorrenti declines to speculate on how much the average sewer earns a week, but estimates that it works out to about \$6 or \$7 an hour. "Every sewer" he observes, is driving a new car.

The success of the com-

pany still seems to amaze Sorrenti and Stephens. They're bubbling over the response to their full-page color ad that appeared in the June issue of Vogue.

Originally, Vogue was to have done a full-scale photo spread featuring Kettle Creek clothing, but then a planned, 45-page segment on Canadian fashion was cut down to 15 pages due to lack of advertising. Still, the ad has brought in a flood of purchase orders from clients across the United States, and negotiations are under way with a major eastern U.S. department store chain interested in installing Kettle Creek Canvas Co. boutiques in each of its locations.

Despite this drastic increase in demand, Kettle Creek will stay next to Kettle Creek, and the home sewers of Port Stanley and environs will continue to produce the clothing. "We'll take every dime we make and spend it in Port," Sorrenti promises, estimating that by using their present facilities and increasing the number of sewers, they can produce five times the current amount of clothing.

Don't miss the delight of Kettle Creek Canvas Co. Designs in Edwards Village Square.

Don't miss THE GRAND OPENING

Friday, August 13, 3:30 p.m.

THE KETTLE CREEK CANVAS CO.



Comes to Midland...exclusively at Edwards Village Square

Hand-made Garments and Bags,
made of 100% cotton canvas and
duck woven in Canada.

All at...

Edwards Village Square

295 King St., upper level 526-8973

