

PRESSING MATTERS



by CJ ANSORGE

How can a gal who grew up in the wide-open spaces of a cattle ranch in northern California find happiness inside the (almost) windowless world of a busy cleaners in Fair Haven, New Jersey? For Vicky Heard, the answer comes as easily as her ever-ready smile: bring your own sunshine with you wherever you go. For Vicky, that has meant making a big place for her family, friends, pets and community—in other words, all her loved ones—at Flair Cleaners, the business she has owned at 761 River Road since 1967.

May 1 marks the anniversary of the day she and her first husband, Kenneth Brett, a master tailor, opened their business in Fair Haven. Together they ran it and raised their two daughters, Liz and Corrie, until his passing in 1990. “I remember I worked to within hours of Elizabeth’s delivery,” says Vicky, “and then I kept a crib at the cleaners. It’s always been our home base.”



Sam Jones, presser, has been on the Flair team since 1980.

Forty-five years of continuous service to the dry cleaning needs of her neighbors pleasantly blur the line between business and pleasure. “Sarah Devlin used to get off bus and play here,” Vicky recalls. “The kids would hide in the boxes when customers came in. The

day Sarah was getting married, she got a big lipstick stain on the front of her wedding dress. She stopped here on the way to the church, in one of those antique cars that went five miles and hour. I ran out to the car, took the spot out, and she went on her way.”



Fair Haven playmates lunching al fresco at Flair (circa 1976): Nicole Rice (now, owner of Coastal Décor on River Road), Liz Brett (U of Penn graduate and mother of Vicky’s two grandchildren), and Brian Rice (financial advisor, Twin Lights Financial, Tinton Falls).

For all the touches of home at Flair—like Vicky’s blooming sidewalk garden out front, the steady stream of rescued animals (including, recently, 57 kittens adopted out of the shop and Claudette, the white bull dog who took up permanent residence), and a bulletin board loaded with photos of local friends and families—this is a hard-working environment with a staff of eight that delivers dry-cleaning and laundry services to thousands of customers who depend on them.

With the exception of laundered shirts, all work is done on premises. Dry cleaning, spot cleaning, pressing, laundry services...every garment is hand-finished and touched-up with a hand iron. Vicky does free home delivery herself to regular house accounts in the local area. After decades of encounters, there isn’t a stain she hasn’t met, and, if at all possible, conquered. “Fabrics play an important part in what they’ll release in the way of stains,” she explains. “And red wine is a killer.”

By Vicky’s account, hundreds of thousands of soiled shirts have entered her doorway over the years, only to leave cleaned and ready for action. It continues to be her pleasure to make it happy for them—and countless other items—to be taken to the cleaners.

Flair team, front and center: Sam Jones, Josh Lukert, Vicky Heard, Walter Jones, Susan Hartsgrove, Reyna Vera, Joseph Guttridge and Christopher Keeton (not pictured).

