

Suburban Life

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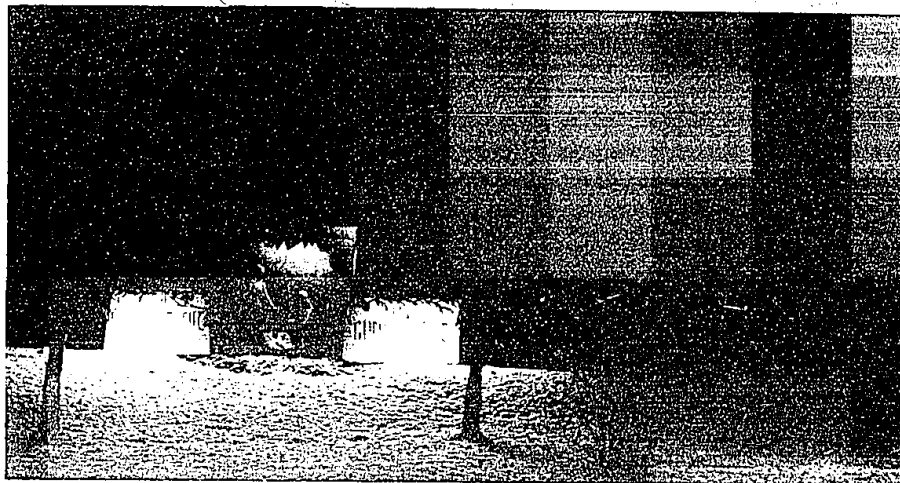


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(F&B)

The Greatest Gift

One of the area's newest nativity scenes set up for the season stands on the grounds of Hope Lutheran Church, 39200 12 Mile. The concept of placing the creche inside a gift box came from congregants Jo and Ron Perian, and the idea was completed with construction of the eight-by-eight-foot box by Rick Jaster, also a member of the church. Lettering on both sides of the scene reads "The Greatest Gift." The scene will remain on the grounds through Twelfth Night, Jan. 6. The congregation's traditional "Candles and Carols" service begins at 7:30 p.m. Christmas Eve. Festival Eucharist is celebrated at 10:30 a.m. Christmas morning.



She walked crooked road into world of couture

By Shirlee Rose Iden
Staff writer

WHILE MANY little girls find fascination in dolls, clothes, and fashion, Donna Alpert walked a crooked road to her career in the world of couture.

Actually, aside from dolls, she grew up in a home where her fashion designer mother, Ann Wallach, was involved in marketing women's wear when Alpert was still toddling.

Alpert, however, says she never dreamed of a career in retailing. Born in Detroit, she grew up in the area, and went to Wayne State University and Michigan State University for a degree in education.

"I taught English in Detroit and Walled Lake Junior High," she says, and then settled down to raise two children. She and her husband, Fred, who live in Farmington Hills have a daughter, Jennifer, 17, and a son, Jason, 14.

"I stayed home with them," says Alpert.

BUT ALONG about the time the children were becoming self-sufficient, Alpert branched out, leaving the household, but not for a career.

"My mother-in-law had a store and sold lovely things," she says.

"I had my eye on this really nice outfit and she said if I would help her one day in the store, she would give it to me.

"Well, I liked the work and began helping her one day a week and everything else that happened stems from that incident 10 years ago."

Today, Alpert's mother-in-law is retired and the daughter-in-law is the proprietor of a sleek women's wear emporium called Sneak Preview along the golden corridor of Northwestern Highway.

More than three years ago, Alpert went from merely selling other people's clothes to having her own place, a

career she refers to as "like a second marriage."

"THE TRANSITION wasn't too bad," she says. "I had done the buying for others, so I knew how to do that and most aspects of the clothing business."

Until a year ago, her business was on Twelve Mile, but these days she leaves home for an open, contemporary shop that was designed completely to her specifications.

"I wanted it to be very eye catching and attractive, but where the clothes could be displayed to the best advantage."

Alpert knows very well that she's in a tough business where the competition is keen and plentiful. Her "gone plan," which she says is necessary, is to focus on personal service and taste.

"Customers give me their sizes, color preferences, and what they like to wear and I keep these on file, even take them to New York with me when I go on buying trips."

ALPERT VALUES this "base" and adds a "lot of running, looking, buying" to her full schedule of hours in the store each week.

Although she carries as many as 90 lines a season, she contends that a store "can't be everything to everyone."

Keeping careful records, she buys heavily from manufacturers she's had success with in previous seasons. And she spends from 6-8 weeks each year in New York.

"It helps to have a clientele who come in season after season for their wardrobe," she says. "Some people know just what's good for them. They have a good eye. Others, not so confident, require the help we can give them."

Alpert has five employees, some part-time, some full-time, but says she has no attraction to opening other stores.

WHEN her career affects her personal life, it's because "I'm not so business-minded really — more involved

with my kids" and "I do wish I could travel, but it's all-encompassing here."

Alpert observes that women's wear is once again become more individual, softer, and feminine. "Last fall we did a tremendous job with sweaters and I expect there will be lots more sweaters, dressing in spring."

"I also believe the interest in suede and leather will stay strong. At least there's a value when you buy a leather garment. You know you can use it for years. Customers are getting far less rigid about dressing."

Buying is the most difficult part of her business, she calculates. "When I finish buying for the regular repeat

customer, it's tough to project what's going to be in demand. I get a lot of information from trade sources.

"It's great to catch the eye, but I've got to make decisions that will translate to sales."

Anyone visualizing a dress buyer slipping wine watching high-style fashion models come down a ramp has the wrong idea.

Alpert explains she seldom sees the fashions on a model because there's no time to wait for clothing changes.

All in all, Alpert isn't complaining. "Although this business is unlike being a school teacher, I like it, it's a real challenge."



Donna Alpert gets on the road from her home in Farmington Hills to head toward "Sneak Preview," her emporium of women's wear on Northwestern Highway in Southfield. Her new career in retailing is one she calls "all encompassing."

Northwestern Highway in Southfield. Her new career in retailing is one she calls "all encompassing."

MINDY BAUNDERS/staff photographer

Holiday driving alert for the elderly

The holiday season is a special time for families, out-of-town guests, dinner invitations and homespun gatherings. Elderly relatives and friends give special meaning to families reminiscing about Christmas pasts and bygone years.

Yet, this time of year also brings a particular burden for senior citizens. Driving to and from shopping malls and attending family gatherings mean that senior citizens are driving at times when their vision is not its best, and weather conditions can make driving conditions even worse.

"The elderly have a more difficult time seeing at night," said Dr. Henry J. Spiro, director of the Cataract and Eye Care Institute. "They are more affect-

ed by the glare of oncoming headlights and their peripheral vision is limited. It's important that families and friends of the elderly be aware of these visual problems whenever possible. Perhaps an early Christmas dinner might be advisable for some or encouraging the folks to stay overnight might be the right answer for others."

SPIRO OFFERS the following tips to elderly drivers.

- Shortened daylight hours mean shadows and hidden objects for persons with impaired vision. Avoid driving at dusk or at night whenever possible.

- Since reaction time slows down with age, avoid alcohol and drugs, which further reduce reactions.

- Daytime driving with snow as an element poses problems with glare and concealed icy spots. Wear the proper glasses for day and night driving, and keep them clean.

- Drive on the alert, keeping pace with the average flow of traffic.

- Keep the windshield clean of vision impairments — cigarette film on the inside, dirt and pollutants on the outside.

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