

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Minerva from page 3B

back to the town recently and afterward she stopped into Minerva's Dunning's department store to visit her old friend.

Maier and Minerva reminisced about times past in the aisles of ladies sportswear and then said good-bye after telling one another how good it was to see each other.

"That's just the way it is these days," Minerva said, waving. "My customers come in to see me. They bring pictures of their grown children and their grandkids. It's wonderful. I remember them all."

Minerva Chaiken won't reveal her age, but she's been selling clothing to women and children for the past 43 years in downtown Plymouth. In 1951, she and husband, Herbert, now deceased, opened Minerva's on Penniman Avenue. The store did well selling women's and children's wear until one very cold night in January, 1958 when a fireable fire destroyed the shop along with a Western Union branch, the Plymouth Draft Board and Bode's Restaurant.

"I remember watching the store burn from across the street on the post office steps," she said. "It was so cold that night. Everything was lost in the fire. Mary Parson's boy kept yelling, 'Mommy, look at my clothing store!' Over and over again. I can still hear his voice. Why, he must be over 30 years old now."

In the spring of that same year, the Chaikens bought competitor Margaret Dunning's shop on Forest Avenue. Minerva put the two business names together and Minerva's Dunning's opened in October.

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Minerva Chaiken

"I guess what kept me in business all these years, and what still keeps me going, even though business isn't what it used to be, is my customers," Minerva explained over coffee and pineapple cake in the kitchen located in the back of the store. "I appreciate every one of them. Can the big stores say that? My sales staff knows just what to show a customer. And we let things go out on approval. We help people make selections they're satisfied with."

If you let my sales staff wait on you, I guarantee you'll go out smiling."

Minerva said there could be no doubt that the opening of Laurel Park Place in Livonia and the expansion of other malls in the area hurt her business. She said she's lost the younger shoppers but holds tight to her "regulars" and people in town.

"I've got more inventory than I ever had," she said. "I know the store's fixtures are old and the store's decor is a little dated, but the merchandise is current. It's out front where it's easy to see. If my customer goes to a mall, she can't always find what she wants. She comes back to me saying, 'I

knew you'd have it,' and we always do. Then they say, 'I hope you don't change.'"

Minerva buys her merchandise from manufacturers' representatives she's dealt with for decades. Sportswear is her biggest category. In the children's division, it's mostly grandmother's buying gifts for their grandchildren, looking for classic styles and good quality. She prices brands like Alfred Dunner, Korat and Fanes competitively with two big sales a year. The fierce competition for shoppers these days has Minerva contemplating additional sales and a raffle for a leather handbag.

Sales staffers Helen Sorenson and Betty Campbell have been with Minerva for almost 20 years. As nine-year employee Arlene Trudeau explained it, "We're like a family here."

In 1955, the mayor of Plymouth presented Minerva with a plaque commemorating her 35th anniversary. She displays it proudly

while denying plans to retire or sell the store.

"I still feel I'm young enough to keep going," she said.

Her wish is for downtown Plymouth to return to its glory days when there were five drug stores in town, a bustling hardware establishment, several places to buy shoes, and numerous groceries.

"It was so wonderful coming to work in the mornings back then," she said with a big smile. "People were sweeping their sidewalks and as you'd walk by, you'd exchange good mornings by name. That's what makes small towns so special."

Minerva, a resident of Livonia, still comes into work each day, though usually not until the afternoon hours. Store hours are Monday-Thursday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Fridays 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays for the holidays, noon to 5 p.m.

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Retailers pick gifts with style

Looking for something out of the ordinary for gift giving this year?

According to a just-released Taubman Shopping Centers survey of 50 major national retailers, here are the year's most unusual holiday gifts:

The Fingerboller Pen. "Boil" liquid with the heat of your hand in this refillable ballpoint pen. Just touch the heat-sensitive glass and watch the liquid bubble from lower to upper chamber. \$5 from Natural Wonders in the Twelve Oaks mall and Somerset Collection.

Folding Russian Micro-Binoculars. Actually used by the KGB, these compact binoculars include advanced optics that gather more light to create a clearer image than larger binoculars. \$30 from Brookstone.

3-D Single-Use Camera. The world's first disposable 3-D camera uses special lenses and computer technology to produce 16 three-dimensional color pictures. \$15 from Rita Camera.

Inflatable "The Scream" Doll. People Magazine recently cited this hot-selling, angst-filled inflatable of Edvard Munch's 1893 expressionist painting for capturing "the level of panic" in people's lives. \$27.95 for 4 1/4-foot floor model, \$10.95 for 4 1/4-inch desk topper from The Art Works.

Edible Gingerbread House. This 30-pound confection measures 23-by-20-by-24-inches. It's safe to eat for up to one year, and each order is shipped direct from a Los Angeles bakery. \$260 from Williams-Sonoma.

Retail Details features the latest openings, closings, merchandise lines, personnel changes, and other news around the malls and Mainstreets community. Mail submissions to: Retail Details, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 8025 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009. Or fax them to 810-644-1314.

ROYAL TOYS

P.A.O. Schwars in the Somerset Collection, Troy is part of an exclusive U.S. launch of Budgie merchandise, inspired by Budgie the Helicopter, a character created by HRFH The Duchess of York. Budgie is now an animated television star in England.

P.A.O. Schwars carries Budgie merchandise, plush toys, push along vehicles, duffies, apparel, playsets and video tapes of the animated series. The merchandise is geared to preschoolers ages 4-6.

SALON CONVENIENCES
The Salon Kennel Bashar, 228 West Maple in downtown Birmingham now features cellular phones, a fax machine, lunch service, and a 10-minute stress relief treatment to better serve its clients. Salon owners Kennel Bashar and Barbara Kallish designed the recently-opened salon with old Italian and French

influences including antique cabinetry to showcase hair products.

Salon Kennel Bashar offers electrolysis, permanent make-up, aromatherapy, corporate massages, European scalp treatments and hair care.

BODY SHOP CAMPAIGN

The Body Shop stores are leading an international effort to collect 10 million signatures in November to protect the world's endangered species. The campaign's efforts will culminate at the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, set for December in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. There, the Body Shop will present the petitions collected to U.S. vice president Al Gore.

The Body Shop will reward the employee who collects over 800 shopper's signatures for support with a 14-day African safari trip to Kenya. The Body Shop has local outlets in Twelve Oaks Mall, downtown Birmingham.

LEFT HANDERS STORE

The Roman word for right was "dexter," their word for left was "sinister," is it any wonder that things have been downhill ever since for left-handed folks? For the estimated 20-million lefties in the U. S., a shop has opened at the Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn. Southpaw sells a complete line of functional, gift and novelty items specially designed for left-handers. These items include

scissors, notebooks, can openers and knives. Southpaw is in a new kiosk in the Lord & Taylor corridor of the mall.

For more information call owner Anne Waldorf Bonner at (313) 240-8282.

NEW AT LAKESIDE

Home Theatre, Inc. and Tony Walker & Company are open at Lakeside in Sterling Heights. Home Theatre, Inc. offers Sony's latest technology. Walker & Company sells cotton casual Australian fashions for men and women.

CISCO'S BENEFIT

"Women for Women" a trade-in clothing benefit will run through Nov. 30 at Chico's, 6883 Orchard Lake on The Boardwalk in West Bloomfield. The gently-used clothing will be passed onto women at The Simon House and Lighthouse.

Chico's will give a 10-percent discount to shoppers on the day they bring in their collections. For (810) 932-5715.

TEAS WITH SANTA

Tickets for Tea with Santa at the Somerset Collection in Troy are available for Friday, Dec. 16 at 4 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 17 at 1 and 4 p.m. in the mall's rotunda. At the tea, children dress in their holiday best and gather at elaborately decorated tables to personally deliver their message to Santa who goes table to table to

meet guests. A magician entertains and children receive treats in addition to a delicious tea presentation. Tickets are \$20 per child, available by calling (810) 643-7440.

DRUMROLL PLEASE

The Birmingham merchants raised \$20,000 through their annual Fashion Show to benefit the Children's Cancer Center at Beaumont Hospital. This figure topped the \$13,000 raised in 1993 to the delight of all participants, including event organizer Richard Astrin.

NEW FRAME SHOP

The Great Frame Up, a do-it-yourself and custom picture framing store is open in Rochester at 113 West University. Owners Dan and Susan McGraw said the store specializes in products not found in typical framing establishments. These include a lower, wheelchair-accessible work station, special framing areas that have work benches equipped with magnetized boards, and "You Name It" mats where customers can spell out words and personal letters for pictures and artwork. Custom framing takes up to 48 hours.

The shop also carries prints and catalogs to access 10,000 works of art. The Great Frame Up operates 185 stores in 30 states. Inquiries are welcome at (810) 650-8500.



All I want for Christmas: Santa's taken his seat at most shopping centers in the area. He reports that he's anxious to meet all the local good boys and girls. At Laurel Park Place in Livonia, he'll be seated on the chair used in Twentieth Century Fox's remake of "The Miracle on 34th Street."

RETAIL DETAILS