

Alvin's bride 'Never missed a wedding'

Alvin Steinman delights in personally greeting every customer that enters his store, Alvin's Bride, at 249 Pierce Street in Birmingham.

It's the type of personal service as well as the largest selection of bridal gowns, dresses for mothers of the bride and groom, bridesmaids dresses and dresses for special occasions that have helped the store grow about 10 times in business since Steinman opened it in 1978.

"When I bought the former Davidson's, it had a bridal department in the basement," Steinman said. "Now that makes up the entire 12,000-square-foot store."

Alvin's Bride has 28 people on staff. They work with each customer on a one-to-one basis. Steinman suggests to make an appointment to get the best service, but adds that no one is turned away.

Part of Alvin's Bride continued success is its dedication to working closely with every bride. "We are constantly striving to carry the best lines in bridal wear," he said. "Also, we offer complete alterations."

Those alterations sure have come in

handy. While the store carries a large selection of sizes from size two on up,



Alvin's Bride, 249 Pierce Street

Steinman tells a story about a large-size bride who wanted a particular dress that didn't come in her size.

"We took two of the same dresses apart and put them together as one dress for her. It only took us two weeks to do it," he said with pride.

Steinman recommends future brides allow at least four to six months to pick out their dress. It has to be ordered and then altered. "Some brides order their dresses 18 months in advance."

Of course if last night's romantic dinner leads a woman to the marriage ceremony in only a matter of days,

Birmingham Boutique owners report another successful shop

Their name may be familiar to you, but their look is definitely different.

I'm referring to Birmingham boutique entrepreneurs Frank and Debbie Caruso, owners of It's The Ritz: Caruso, Caruso; and now - Frankie & Debbie's. Located at 120 West Maple, the couple's "new baby" is across the street from their two other downtown locations. It opened last March.

"It was created to show a personal side of what Frankie and I are about," said Debbie Caruso. "We've been together for a long time and created this boutique with bits and pieces of our past."

The 600-square-foot store sells clothing for men and women, but features things from the past in the form of decor like hanging antique quilts

which make up the dressing rooms, a cash counter from a turn of the century bank, antique doors as shelves and more.

"It's very upbeat," said Caruso. "When you walk in, you feel like you're walking onto a stage."

The Carusos had a goal of emanating energy and fun through the design of their boutique. That is the reason for their 8-foot-high Wall of Love, a cemented collection of Barbie and Ken dolls, earrings, buttons and other mementos representing the couple's history.

"My goal is to make people happy," she said. That includes the people she hopes to help with the purple Victorian sink placed in front of the Wall of Love. "It's a place where people can throw spare change and we'll donate to charity."

Four employees, including co-managers Jeremy Chance and Kristin Jaerling, help customers coordinate outfits from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and on Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Thursday and Friday and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

"I think you have to have a passion about whatever you do in life," said Caruso about opening another boutique. "Passion drives people to do (things) well."

She reports that the new boutique is definitely doing well.



Jeremy Chance, Co-manager, at the Wall of Love.

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