

## Old-World Is Back at Expressions Custom Furniture

Bigger isn't always better. That's the lesson Expressions Custom Furniture store owner Rose Kelly taught the parent company when she eliminated the second floor - and set business records.

"Since we took over the store in August of last year our business has been consistently up 40 percent," Kelly said. "We also won the award for the highest dollar sales volume per square foot in our 62-store chain."

Even though the store is now limited to 4,700 square feet, Kelly has maximized the use of the space she has, including getting more use out of accessories.

"Pillows can make a huge difference in causing a room to appear different," she said. For this reason, the store carries a large number of pillows in various fabrics and styles.

This year, Kelly said that softer, more old-world fabrics are popular, such as velvet and chenilles.

"We're using a lot of tapestries," she added.

She explained that with the strong trend in design to use pillows, sofas are being built to accommodate them.

Of course, customers can also design their own sofas.

"You can buy any of the fabrics we have or choose from thousands we can order," she said. "You may apply them to frames, changing the size of the sofa, the skirts, the base. This really assures you that you won't have the same sofa that Mrs. Jones has."

Usually, this process takes 12 to 14 weeks, but Kelly's customers may have their sofa within about 45 days because of an exclusive agreement with the Westwood furniture factory. "The furniture is of a very high quality and comes with a lifetime warranty," Kelly said.

"The other thing I changed is, when customers come in, they may take the accessories and lamps right off the floor," she said. "They won't have to wait six to eight weeks for a special order."

"The unique selection of winter and holiday accessories can make your home warm and inviting," she said. We will have a large assortment to choose from over the next few weeks.

Altogether, with the new store design, Kelly keeps about 20 different groups, or room settings, on the store floor at any one time. In the third week of October the store will receive a complete makeover, with most of the furniture groups being replaced with new models and styles.

Expressions Custom Furniture spe-



Back left, Vicky Jackson; back right, Jeffry McCormick; front left Kristen Olson; front center Rose Kelly; front right Nicole Sakhar.

cializes in living room and family room furniture such as sofas, coffee tables and armoires. The store also offers unusual metal beds and the Westwood factory makes a great custom duvet, or comforter cover.

In addition to having an excellent product, Kelly also succeeds with an unusual degree of customer service. For example, Kelly's staff of design consultants will regularly visit customers in their homes and do floor plans, coordinate floor schemes, help them arrange their rooms.

Kelly also bought a delivery business in order to ensure that her furniture received the "white glove" treatment as it was transported to the customers' homes.

"When my husband and I moved to the area we had trouble finding such a service," she said.

Now that they own one, they make sure that the drivers are uniformed and wear gloves whenever handling furniture. The also steam the fabrics before delivery so that they are never wrinkled when they arrive. Finally, before carrying a piece into the house, they will lay down runners to protect carpets and floors.

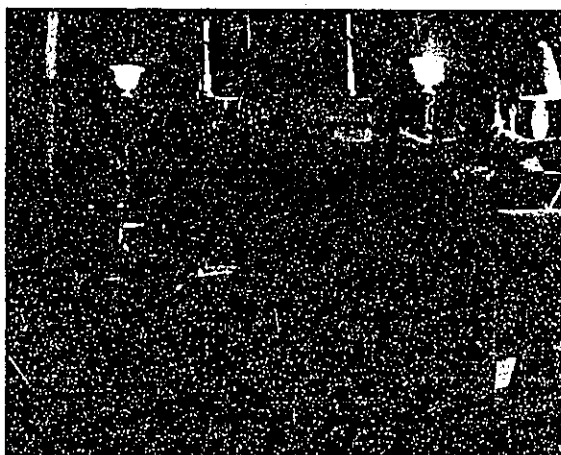
The delivery business, which Kelly runs with her husband, serves about 150 clients in the Detroit metropolitan area. Most of the clients are interior designers anxious that their customers get that same kind of deluxe treatment.

Building on the success of her store, Kelly plans to open two more - one in the Rochester area and one in the Novi market - within the next two years.

Expressions Custom Furniture is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday. The store can be reached at (810) 647-8882.

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