

POINTS OF VIEW

Bridal business saga unearths broken promises

Businesses do go under. Suppliers, employees and customers get hurt.

But somehow the ongoing saga of the disappointments the owners of a chain of bridal salons have wrought on hundreds of brides-to-be and their families unleashes a particular anger.

It's estimated that about 5,000 women from all over the metro area, at what is supposed to be one of the happiest times of their lives, may have been duped by Gary and Donna Gottschling, owners of six bridal shops centered in Birmingham.

Sara Kominars of Bloomfield Township was married Sunday in a gown she had to order directly from the manufacturer after Boulevard Bridal broke several delivery dates. Her deposit was on a credit card, which the company appears to be willing to take off her bill. But several of her bridesmaids' deposits were by cash or check.

Kimberly Darling of Livonia was "strung along" until three days before her Aug. 15 wedding after ordering a dress from Today's Bride last January.

Panicky, she called Jacobson's, which was able to get the same wedding gown shipped overnight to them and altered before she exchanged vows.

Tuesday morning, an unidentified woman was seen filling out a report at the Birmingham Police Department against the Sue Gordon Salon, probably the most upscale of all the Gottschlings' operations. She had put a substantial deposit down on a \$6,000 wedding dress, eight bridesmaid dresses as well as silk flowers and petticoats — in an effort at one-stop bridal shopping.

Birmingham has, without a lot of fanfare, been somewhat of a bridal capital — with five major bridal salons. Jacobson's and Alvins offer complete bridal services, and continue to come to the rescue of a number of the brides left stranded by Gottschling operations.

I remember several years back, while shopping for a daughter's wedding, being surprised that the other three, each with a different name but privy to much of the same merchandise, were



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owned by the same people.

True, each had its own aura. If you happened on a Saturday to enter Boulevard Bridal, a long, low, warehouse-like building on Hunter, you generally had to take a number. Dozens of brides-to-be floated in and out of dozens of dressing rooms and back into the heavily mirrored main sales area — to pick out dresses, fully view their choices and be fitted.

Today's Bride had a more personal atmosphere. Housed in a small, two-

story building on Birmingham's bypass, it was a step up in sales and service.

Sue Gordon, surrounded by galleries and boutiques, in Birmingham's North Woodward "culture gulch," was the quintessence of bridal salons. Appointments were encouraged.

But today, it doesn't matter. Regardless of price, size of the order, or the atmosphere and service rendered, deposits were taken for dresses the Gottschlings allegedly knew would not be shipped by the manufacturer because of unpaid debts.

Managers were also directed to sell dresses off the displays as new, according to an investigation by the Oakland County prosecutor.

Now, several thousand brides later, the prosecutor, Detroit's Office of Consumer Affairs and the Birmingham Police Department are closing in. A temporary restraining order has been issued preventing the owners from taking money for dresses not in stock.

And as of Tuesday morning, more than 50 reports had been filed with

Birmingham police by women willing to testify against the owners.

The Gottschlings were due in the prosecutor's office Wednesday, business records in hand, to answer questions under oath.

Through it all, the Gottschlings have been lying low. A statement was released that they are in negotiations to sell the bridal shops "because of adverse publicity." Recently, they apparently worked out an agreement to have dresses shipped from the manufacturer directly to brides who have weddings in the next 30 days.

Businesses do go under. Suppliers, employees, customers do get hurt. But rules exist for bankruptcies and closing businesses which don't seem to have been followed here. Somehow you hope these operators will be held fully accountable for their debts as well as the worries they've caused.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

LETTERS

Edison's side

The Farmington Observer has called in a recent editorial for improved electric service and faster restoration of outages following severe storms.

We at Detroit Edison agree and, as you and most of your readers know, the most extensive improvement program in Detroit Edison's history is now underway and already is showing positive results.

The Farmington/Farmington Hills area has experienced an improvement in service and our program of improvement continues.

However, your recommendations on this subject require some explanation, which you have not given your readers.

You suggested that all electric, cable TV, telephone and gas lines be put underground. "To us," you say, "that just

isn't a complicated concept." While it can be done, it is costly and can be very disruptive in established areas.

The cost of putting lines underground ranges from three to 10 times as much as putting them overhead, a cost that customers would bear in their electric bills.

But perhaps even more important, while putting lines underground in new developing areas is not particularly disruptive, how many people in developed areas would want to have their roads, sidewalks, lawns, trees, gardens, swimming pools, outdoor lighting and other amenities uprooted as utility crews came through a neighborhood to put lines underground?

You say: "There might be fewer power outages, we think, if there were several competing providers of electricity." Do you mean that each competing utility has its own set of poles, lines,

transformers, capacitors, lighting arresters, surge protectors, substations, etc., all running up and down the same streets?

Does that mean that you choose the provider that you think will give the best service? And for those who guess wrong, do they wait for repairs? Or do they wait to be hooked up to another utility? And should each system be designed to carry the entire load of the area where they have facilities? Or just a portion? And if so, which portion?

As you can see, this too is not as simple as you portray.

I appreciate your wanting to obtain better service for your readers. We share your feelings on this matter but I respectfully suggest that you could serve them best by listening to "the other side," then serving as a conveyor of balanced information.

If that becomes your number one

goal, I think we, the community and your newspaper would all be better served.

Maurice L. Vermeulen, manager, Oakland Division, Detroit Edison

Drive carefully

Having just read your article entitled "School's In," and "Bicycle Safety for Kids" in the Observer, I had to add my thoughts.

Wednesday evening my husband came home just before 9 p.m., still shaken by a near traffic accident he experienced. He was on his way to a summer scripture class at our church. His "alternate route" took him along Hills Tech Drive west to Haggerty.

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, sped a motorcycler, heading straight toward the car. The driver, a boy about

14 or so, looking neither to the right nor the left, came roaring out of a driveway leading from one of the small office buildings along the road.

On the back of the machine rode a boy of about 10 or 11. The driver was wearing a helmet, the passenger was not. Thank God both the car brakes, and my husband's reaction were excellent.

A question comes to mind. Are Hills Tech Drive and the parking lots along the way known as popular places for young people to use motorcyclers or bicycles after the office empty?

Now that the road repairs are underway, Tech Drive has become a busy route to get from Haggerty Road to Halsted. If the answer to my above question is yes, then, as your article states, perhaps "motorists will need to drive more defensively."

Isobel L. North, Farmington

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