

Careers from page 10A

"Business is always changing, the hair accessory that everyone wants today is not what everyone wants tomorrow. You've got to study the sales figures, lifestyle trends, and talk to your buyers in other departments."

She said buyer salaries typically start at \$30,000.

Analyzing sales figures, crunching numbers and challenging vendors is only part of what Renee Blaszkowski does as district manager of nine Ann Taylor stores.

She got her retail wings through various positions with The Gap. Her favorite job was opening the Providence, Rhode Island Gap store next to Brown University when Amy Carter was a student there.

"I met the President Jimmy Carter, Amy Carter, and boy did those secret service agents buy a lot of Gap clothing," she recalled.

"I eventually opened 11 stores for the Gap in four years while CEO Mickey Drexler believed the Gap should be like 7-11 with a store on every corner."

"It seems in the '80s, people snapped with their pockets open — sales were phenomenal. One store went from \$300,000 to \$5 million in just one year."

She said she joined Ann Taylor after meeting CEO Sally Kasaks in New York and hearing about her vision for the company and her desire to empower other women to achieve their business goals.

Blaszkowski said it's no mystery that the retail world is filled with women, but men typically control most decision-making at the top.

"Ann Taylor offers suits and separates for the business woman," she said, explaining that the name was chosen to suggest the type of merchandise within. "Suits are always up front in all our stores," she said.

"I visit each of the stores under my jurisdiction every 10 days to lead, coach, challenge and energize my sales force. I fill management vacancies quickly, keep staff levels up, answer every customer letter, develop training and action plans, prepare profit/loss statements for each store, pay expenses and meet payroll."

"A district manager has to make sure each of the stores in

the chain are clean and well-presented because we're indirectly telling women that we can take care of them, too."

Blaszkowski pointed out that retail work requires a lot more physical exertion than most people expect.

"You're on your feet for long periods of time and you're always bending, stretching, moving clothing racks, and cleaning." She advised retail newcomers to search out mentors and watch how they motivate, solve problems and manage people. She credited several managers with inspiring her retail career. She advised starting out in low volume stores where an employee learns all aspects of retail by wearing many hats.

Azar of Laurel Park Place in Livonia discussed her career switch from advertising to marketing and all the challenges of promoting a mid-size mall.

"My job is both exciting and exhilarating," she said. "I love the creative aspect of coming up with new ideas for promotions. Our ad slogan is 'Laurel Park Place: We're just the right size.' We analyzed the competition and positioned ourself accordingly."

Azar organizes workshops for tenants, oversees the center's comment card service (which has processed some 6,000 comments from shoppers), administers programs that support the community (the mall recently awarded \$2,600 in scholarships to three high school seniors), and monitors seasonal shopper bonus programs where last month 450 customers redeemed receipts totaling \$150 to earn a gardening tool set, generating mall sales of \$90,000.

Area managers Tina Spencer and Kristen Komen advocated retail internships where real industry lessons can be learned. They both stressed "people skills" for anyone with thoughts of retail management.

Madonna University in Livonia offers a Bachelor of Science degree or Associate degree in Merchandising Management with specialization in either Fashion or General Retail. For more details about the program call (313) 432-5533.

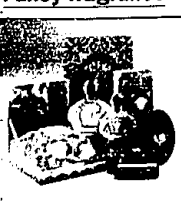
New Collection



Discount Designer: At select T. J. Maxx stores, the WilliSmith Collection was introduced to offer customers high fashion at low price points. The new 1,000-square foot boutiques are at the Bloomfield Hills and Ann Arbor stores. WilliSmith offers classic sportswear separates in natural fabrics. The three-piece outfit retails at \$133, but at T.J. Maxx it's \$74.97.

RETAIL DETAILS

Fancy fragrance



New at Saks: Gianni Versace's BLONDE celebrates the scent of the tuberose. It's elegantly packaged with Versace's trademark Medusa symbol on each item in the collection — exclusively at Saks Fifth Avenue through June.

Retail Details features news briefs from the malls and Main Streets beat. To be included, send information to: Retail Details, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009. Or fax (810) 644-1314.

■ STORE CLOSÉS
Lillie Rubin Stores filed for Chapter 11 closing several locations across the country including the one at the Somerset Collection in Troy. The store at Twelve Oaks in Novi remains open for business. As one employee said, "it's business as usual for us and hopefully soon, things will be all right."

■ CAUSE MARKETING
With every purchase of a CamoCare skin-care product (camomile-based, cruelty-free) at Good Food Company East in Troy or Betty's Grocery Store in Birmingham, 5 percent of the sale will be donated to a charity of the retailer's choice. At Betty's

It's Save The Rainforest, at Good Food it's Save The Children.

■ NEW STEAK HOUSE OPENS
Ruth's Chris Steakhouse opens mid-May in the Top of Troy Building, 755 West Big Beaver.

Specializing in large (12- to 24-ounce portions) of corn-fed, fresh-never-frozen U.S. prime beef, the restaurant will be open Monday-Sunday beginning at 5 p.m. Dinner is a la carte with entrees priced \$12-\$33. The decor captures the tradition of private golf club dining rooms with seating for 200 and a large, granite-topped mahogany bar.

Owner/operators T. J. Moran

& Associates, have other Ruth's Chris locations in Chicago, Nashville, and Memphis. The company was founded in 1965 by Ruth Fertel who bought the original 60-seat Chris Steak House in New Orleans. Today the restaurants are the highest volume premium steak houses in the country with the Troy location bringing the number to 50. For more information call (810) 269-8424.

■ LIQUIDATION SALE
Clique Boutique on Northwestern in Southfield is relocating its shop to Florida. The entire inventory has been priced for clearance through May/June. Inquiries welcome at (810) 356-0741.

PETITE MODEL SEARCH
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This search will be conducted by ROBERT AMATRUDA, DIRECTOR OF "Petite Management" Ltd., one of the most well known petite agencies in L.A. (Robert scouted for ELITE for 10 years). Recently, his petite models can be seen in commercials for Trident, 7UP, Target and also on soaps like Young & the Restless, Bold & the Beautiful and Baywatch.

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