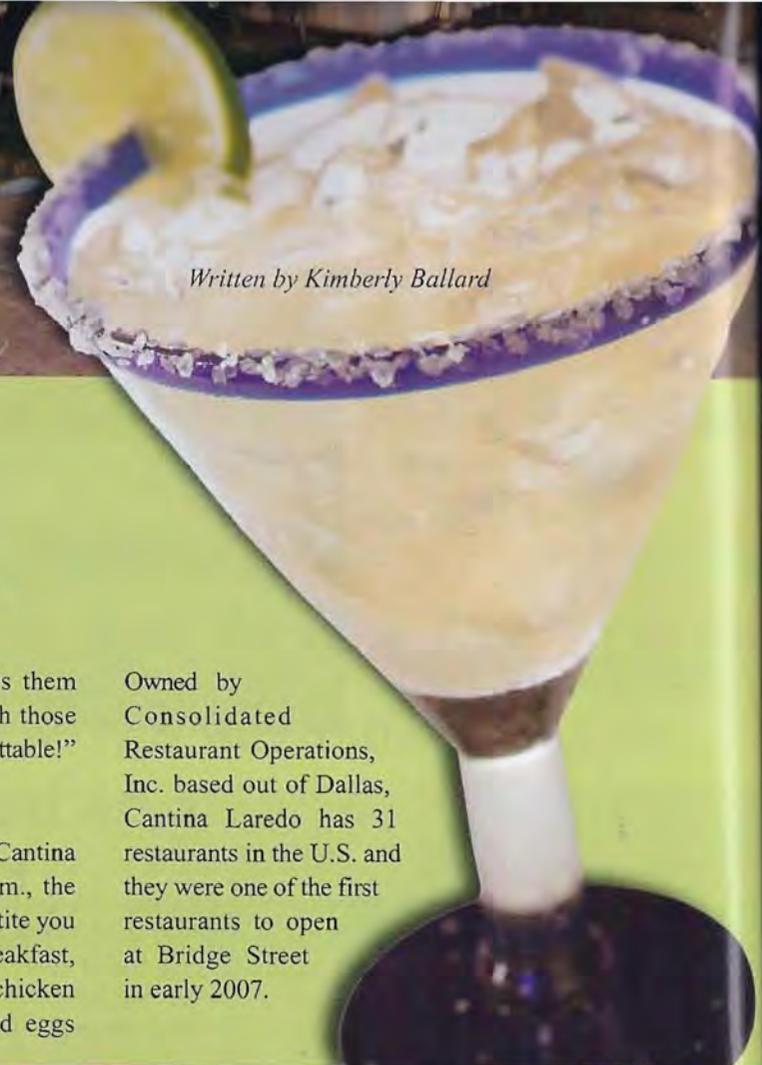




Cantina Laredo a Huntsville Favorite



Written by Kimberly Ballard

Secret Sauces, Mexican Spices, and Lo Mejor Margaritas Make Cantina Laredo a Huntsville Favorite

Famous for their secret-recipe signature sauces that give their fish, steak, and chicken dishes a proprietary zing, Cantina Laredo adds a little local flavor to their menu at their Bridge Street Town Centre location, to make it one of Huntsville's favorite authentic Mexican restaurants.

According to Cedric Curry, veteran restaurateur and Cantina Laredo's general manager, providing Huntsville residents and visitors with authentic gourmet Mexican food goes hand-in-hand with supporting the local community. "If you assume the sauces on your table are poured from a jar, think again," Curry says. "Every sauce on the table or served with your meal is made fresh from scratch everyday in the kitchen. We slow roast fresh tomatoes for our salsa for over four hours. Every enchilada is hand rolled and our famous guacamole won an award at the 2010 Taste of Huntsville."

Although you may not always think of steaks when you visit a Mexican restaurant, the filet portabella and cascabel ribeye are good enough to compete with the best steakhouses in the Midwestern U.S. The reason why the fresh fish, chicken, and steaks all have an extra something that makes them uniquely Cantina Laredo is

their exclusive blend of seasonings that gives them their distinct flavors. "We grill our steaks with those special seasonings and it does make them unforgettable!" Curry says.

Sunday brunch has become a popular event for Cantina Laredo. Served from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., the menu, which Curry says whets that strange appetite you feel after sleeping in late and missing breakfast, but leaves you wanting of lunch. Items like a chicken fajita omelet, chorizo con huevos (scrambled eggs with Mexican sausage), crab cakes Benedict, and the chilaquiles (chicken in sautéed tortillas with cascabel sauce) are popular along with a complimentary mimosa or Bloody Maria.

"We also serve a vegetarian and gluten-free menu for people who are health conscious or have dietary concerns," Curry says.

Owned by Consolidated Restaurant Operations, Inc. based out of Dallas, Cantina Laredo has 31 restaurants in the U.S. and they were one of the first restaurants to open at Bridge Street in early 2007.



www.eventhuntsville.com

Curry says he is committed to supporting local businesses and the surrounding community. In fact, he opens the restaurant at daybreak in order to accommodate a local BNI (Business Networking International) group that meets every Thursday morning at 7:00 a.m. A women's networking group meets every other Monday at 11:00 a.m. and Cantina Laredo's private dining room is always open for special business luncheons, meetings, and functions; family gatherings; and holiday parties.



The bright, open, contemporary atmosphere features a light-paneled angular design with easily adjusted faux wooden blinds; an enormous, circular bar; and pleasant, yet unobtrusive, Spanish background music. Brunch, lunch, or dinner, the service is meticulous. Thursday is Ladies' Day with half-priced margaritas, made with freshly squeezed lemons and limes. And Cantina Laredo margaritas are hands-down, "definitivamente las mejores margaritas en Alabama!"

Cantina Laredo's private dining room is always open for special business luncheons, meetings, and functions; family gatherings; and holiday parties.





Something Old, Something New... at Railroad Station Antique Mall

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photos by Chuck Mitchell

Located in the historic Lombardo Building on North Jefferson Street downtown, just blocks from the Old Huntsville Depot, is the city's most distinctive shopping experience. Built in 1922 as a wholesale grocery, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Railroad Station Antique Mall is a three-floor delight for the exploratory shopper and treasure-seeker. With prices ranging from \$1 to \$10,000, Railroad Antiques offers a miscellany of uncommon gift items, antique and unfinished furniture, artwork, books and jewelry, indoor and outdoor décor, dishes, linens, vintage clothing, rugs, holiday and seasonal decorations, toys and children's furnishings, lamps, candles and even interior decorating services. Watching over it all is a rather famous local ghost named Bill.

Get lost among the largest collection of sterling silver in North Alabama. Stroll through a huge gallery of hard-to-find European oils on canvas dating back to the nineteenth century. Probe the hundreds of curio cabinets filled with crystal, porcelain, and glass figurines, vintage jewelry and dolls, and handcrafted metal and glass *objets d'art*. Take home nostalgic old maps and photographs of lives long past. Be awestruck by the detail in portraits by Huntsville's Jerry Whitworth, now a famous living Parisian painter.

"We specialize in antiques, but we have something for everyone in any style and price range," says owner Suzanne Conway. "Sometimes 'antiques' makes people think they cannot afford to come look around. We have soaps, candles, desktop accessories and knick-knacks, as well as period pieces for serious collectors. Much of our selection is recognized for its originality in design and artisanship."

Tucked back in the corner is the oldest working Otis Elevator in Alabama, a wooden-gated lift offering access to the second and third floors. Permanently relocated on the second floor, Shaver's Books is known as a reliable outlet for the works of local and regional writers like Homer Hickam, Jr., Wernher von Braun, and *When Spirits Walk* author and host of *Huntsville Ghost Walk*, Jacquelyn Reeves. Shaver's carries a large selection of rare, first editions, and children's books.

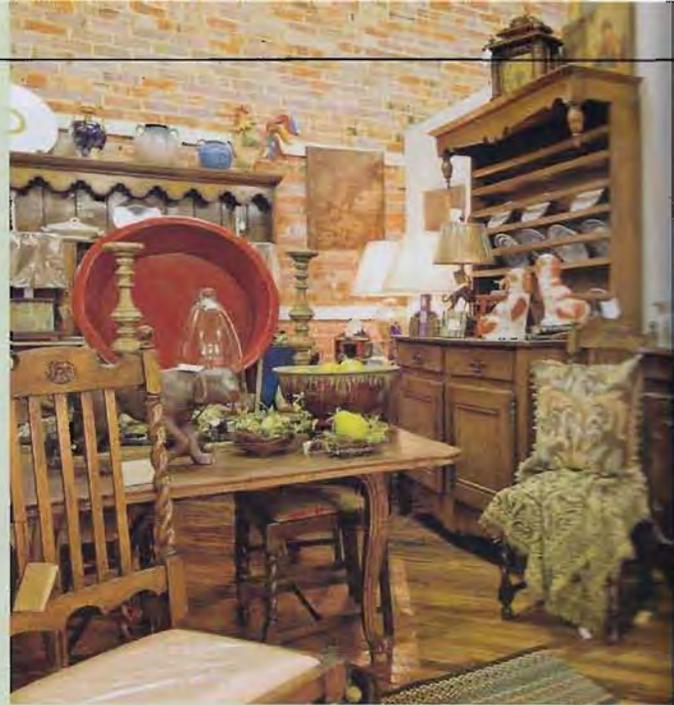
The Heritage Rug Company is the mall's newest dealer providing unheard-of prices on hand-knotted, antique, and semi-antique rugs - some dating from 1900 to the 1930s. Shoppers will find fabrics for custom upholstery and



professional advice on interior decorating. Jane Jones of J.Jones Ltd., Suzanne's decorating partner, specializes in lamps and unusual decorative accents. Jones and Conway use existing client furniture and/or accessories to create new looks. Furniture lovers will find period pieces for living room, dining room, bedroom, patio, and den, and contemporary mirrored furniture. Primitive Early American unfinished and refinished tables, cabinets, chairs, and sofas sit alongside hand-painted cabinets, hand-carved chests and armoires, and even eclectic oddities that are easily integrated into a contemporary decorating scheme.

Then there is Bill - he resides on the third floor. According to many patrons of Railroad Antiques, including employees - the "presence" of a tall, older man wearing coveralls seems to spend most of his time in the children's department. Exiting the stairwell and turning the corner, Suzanne's husband Ron's office sits right next to the children's furniture and toy area. Walking down the long third floor corridor, it may be the play of fluorescent lights on elaborate baroque-framed wall mirrors, clocks, and mirrored *trumeaux* that cause the double take, but the slightest wispy movement in the peripheral vision is enough to raise hair on the arm.

"I have never seen Bill myself," Suzanne admits, "but I have experienced his ghostly pranks many times. We often hear the significant shifting around of items



on glass counters when there is no one here but Ron and I; and working here at night have had encounters." One such time to climb a ladder, leaving them off to the side. A couple of days was ready to leave, the shoes could not be found. "They were there and finally, baffled, she left barefoot. The next morning - right where she knew she had left them."

Railroad Antiques often holds promotional events that are intended to introduce people to the mall's offerings. "We have trunk shows, and our three sterling silver dealers come every year. They bring in extra merchandise including special pieces that keep regularly on display, and they offer exceptional pricing.

As for Bill, well, he was blamed for a bizarre computer outage. "The technician said he had never seen anything like it. The building went down - their hardwiring fried at the source."

Maybe next time, Bill should be invited to the wine and cheese



ServisFirst

Banks on the Future

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photos by Gary Patterson



It has been a fascinating time in history to be in the banking industry, but amidst the national storm, a bold and innovative team of Alabama bankers saw the potential for a growth market in banking that would prove a pleasant alternative for customers growing leery of large conglomerate banks. While corporate banks scrambled to survive, ServisFirst Bank grew out of the rubble to serve everyday customers and businesspeople who apart from the national fray, just require the benefits they have come to expect from a bank: financial security, personal service and convenience. "I've learned more in the past three or four years than I did in my first 17 years in banking," says Andy Kattos, president and CEO of ServisFirst Bank, "For the first time in my career, I see clients migrating toward smaller banks."

From the inside, some of the problems were foreseeable. "The handwriting was on the wall by 2006," Kattos says, "and we knew the residential and commercial real estate markets were problematic." Kattos, who worked as executive vice president and senior lender for First Commercial Bank for 14 years, joined a team of bankers with ties to the Alabama market

who saw an opportunity to start a new kind of bank, built from the ground up, and based on a shareholder client model. They began with a customer base who would buy stock in the bank, attracted by the long-term investment opportunity, and who would actually drive new customers to the bank through referrals. "The most important part of starting a bank is having capital and a deposit base in place," Kattos explains. "With that, there is little chance



of failing." Kattos raised more than \$14 million in capital to start ServisFirst in Huntsville. Named the most profitable bank in Alabama in 2010 according to a survey by SNL Financial, the bank was profitable in its eighth month of operation and has been profitable in every quarter since.

"ServisFirst was the first to offer remote deposit capture where you can make a deposit from your desktop..."

As a private bank, ServisFirst turned its focus from residential and commercial real estate loans to more stable loan activity in the private sector where there were still signs of growth like industrial, government contracting, technology, medical, retail, military and biotech. ServisFirst opened banks right in the center of the banking storm in Birmingham in 2005, Huntsville in 2006, Montgomery in 2007, and Dothan in 2009. The result of

Furthermore, new locations are set for Pensacola, Fla. "People may ask 'Why Pensacola?', until you understand our strategy to open banks in cities with growth potential for business. Pensacola is a business town with a military base. People think of it as a resort town, but it really isn't. Also, Pensacola is a jumping off point for opening in Mobile."

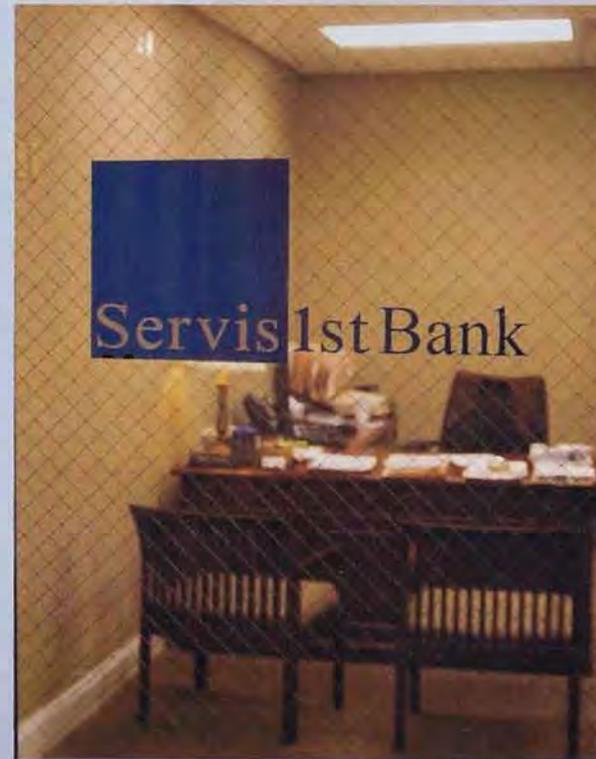
Kattos sees two more major changes in the banking industry. The first is in how a bank builds its customer base. "Today, we aggressively go after customers. We have a dedicated team who goes out in the field to talk to businesses about why they will benefit from banking with ServisFirst. If they are unhappy with any aspect of their current banking, we give them reasons to switch," Kattos says. This is entirely different from the traditional banking strategy in which an ad campaign lures you into a huge corporate bank, or you just happen to wander into a location nearby.

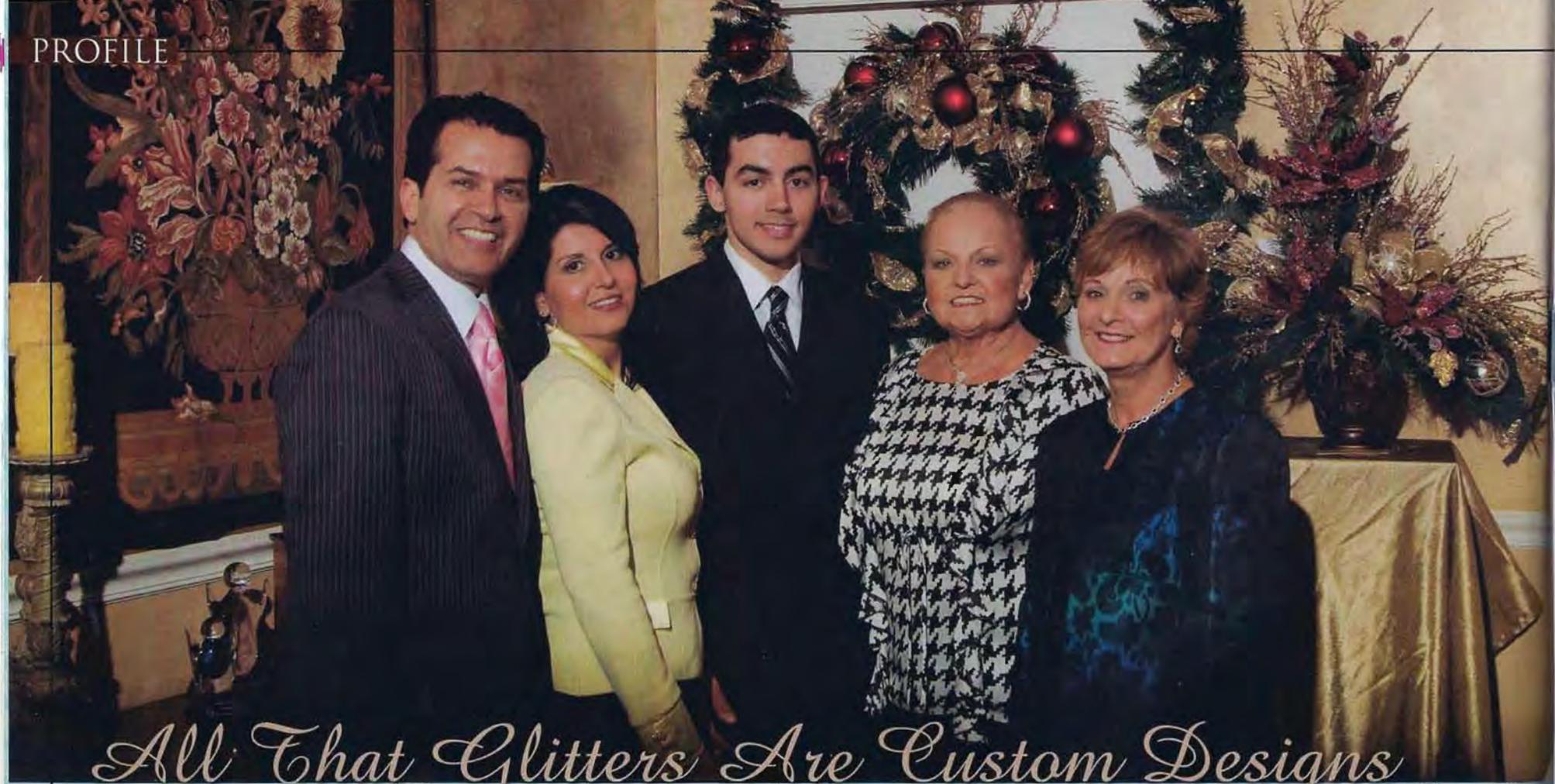
The second major change is the unrelenting move toward mobile banking and electronic transactions. "ServisFirst was the first to offer remote deposit capture where you can make a deposit from your desktop — we have been doing that for about five years."

their efforts are 21 consecutive quarters of profit with problem loans well below the national level; \$1.9 billion in assets across nine locations; and being named in the top 20 most efficient banks by American Banker magazine.



Kattos says there are also many new applications for your phones, which as soon as they are proven safe and secure, will give customers less reason to come into a bank. "Over time, the traditional brick and mortar bank will go the way of the phone booth," Kattos predicts. ■





All That Glitters Are Custom Designs by Donny's Diamond Gallery

*Written by Kimberly Ballard
Photos by Gary Patterson*

All that glitters may not be gold, but in all likelihood, it is diamonds. Rumored to be a girl's best friend, their glistening allure proved more than a brainy Iranian-born computer programmer named Donny Maleknia could resist as well. Donny began wholesaling diamonds as a sideline business more than 20 years ago. Reverting to his love of art, a subject he taught in an Iranian high school before coming to the

U.S. 32 years ago, he saw an opportunity to give up microchips for "ice," chips and merged his artistic eye with those shimmering, glittering rocks. Huntsville's star jewelry designer was born.

Donny joined Service Merchandise where he became their top diamond producer nationwide out of more than 400 stores. A customer introduced the handsome

diamond aficionado to a beautiful Iranian woman who had immigrated to the States, and ironically, she was from the same region of Iran as Donny. It was love at first sight and by the time the Service Merchandise chain closed its doors more than a decade ago, the timing was perfect for him and Fatemeh Nazarieh, to open their own diamond store.

Fatemeh, who left her profession as a nutritionist to go into a partnership with Donny, acts as the company's CFO and marketing director. Flipping through a photograph album recording the high points of their 11 years at the Memorial Parkway location, Fatemeh recalls their frustrating, but relentless, search for the perfect location. "This store was once a hamburger stand," she says, "The sign said



'Hamburgers for Ten Cents'. We did a lot of remodeling to get the store where it is now!"

Today, Donny's Diamond Gallery is a family-owned business, deeply entrenched in the Huntsville community and philanthropically active in dozens of nonprofit organizations. They freely contribute merchandise to silent and live auctions when asked, and sit on the Board of Directors for the Better Business Bureau, the National Children's Advocacy Center, and the Heritage Club.

To meet Donny and Fatemeh is to understand their success. Their friendly smiles and outgoing personalities are as appealing



as the diamonds they sell. They wave to customers through the glass from the showroom before you step through the doors, and Donny greets you with a goblet of sparkling water, served on gold embossed cocktail napkins, while you discuss with him your ideas.

"It begins with the center stone," Donny explains. "I build the rest of the piece around the size and cut of that stone. When you talk to people about what they want, or they show you pictures of what they like, there is always commonality that helps me design the piece."

"It is our company theme," Fatemeh explains, "If you dream it, Donny will create it."

Take your jewelry you no longer wear, or that has been handed down to you, and let Donny's design a piece you will wear,



using those heirloom stones, diamonds, and precious metals. "This way you are holding onto the sentimental and monetary value of your heirloom pieces, but we have created for you, something more practical and suited to your style and taste," says Fatemeh.



Donny's can redesign old-fashioned jewelry into a more contemporary style or give a contemporary piece a lovely old-fashioned flair. He can create jewelry from scratch, purchase loose stones for you, and design something you have dreamed of giving to a loved one, or wearing yourself.

Build your holiday season around something that always glitters even better than gold - diamonds from Donny's Diamond Gallery. ■





Silk Suit, Black Tie

— You Don't Need a Reason Why

Written by Kimberly Ballard Photos by Chuck Mitchell

Is it true? Is every girl crazy 'bout a sharp dressed man? Johnny Thrasher, owner of Thrasher Clothing, has spent 45 years in the men's clothing business, and through the years, he knows the effect well-fitting clothes have on how a man looks and feels about himself. Although getting the ladies may not always be the motivation for dressing fine, every professional businessman benefits from a crisp new shirt, a shiny pair of cufflinks, new shoes, and a perfectly tailored pair of slacks. Add a cashmere sport coat and shoot those cuffs, and well... *you ain't missing not a single thing!*

The dapper Mr. Thrasher started as an apprentice in 1963 while attending Gadsden High School. "In those days, you went to school until lunchtime and then you could go into a work program," he explains. "I started working for Bud's Menswear when I was 14 years old. In those days it was OJT — on the job training." Bud's was an Alabama men's clothing chain and after high school, Johnny went to work for them full time

"When Bud's closed, I went to work for Hollis Clothing, before branching out on my own in 1991." Johnny went to work for the Tom James Company, the world's largest manufacturer and retailer of custom clothing. "I had built up quite a clientele over the years, and since a lot of men do not like to shop for clothes, the Tom James model worked for me." He was able to offer a one-on-one, personalized service to businessmen around town who wear suits, dress shirts, and ties to work every. He called and made an appointment, took sample fabrics out to his customers, often at their office; took measurements, and delivered to their home or office top-of-the-line men's custom clothing a couple of weeks later.

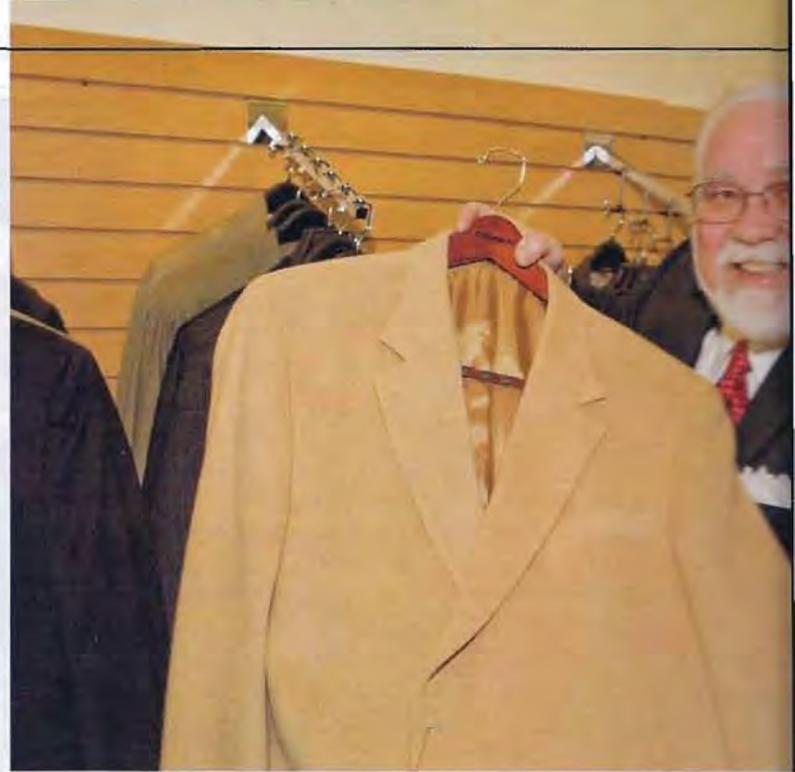
In 2006, Johnny built his own store, Thrasher Clothing in Five Points, specializing in custom clothing, but carrying a great deal of ready-to-wear, as well as tuxedo rentals. In 2007, he slowed down a bit after a heart attack, but reopened in 2009 in his new location on Regal Drive, just a block



“For people who do not feel they can afford custom clothing, we carry a broad selection of men’s ready-to-wear,” says Terry Whitsett, the store’s manager. “What’s more, we sell all types of men’s accessories too – ties, socks, jewelry, belts, shoes, handkerchiefs, you name it. Women are welcome because we offer items that make great gifts for any man.”

In the past couple of years, Thrasher’s has added Mr. Tuxedo to their product line. “Tuxedo rentals are a large part of men’s attire,” Johnny says. “If you wear a tux more than two or three times a year, it is to your advantage to buy one, but for the occasional wedding or formal dinner, Mr. Tuxedo is the way to go.”

Among Thrasher’s many lines are Austin Reed, Hart Shaffer Marx, Palm Beach, Corbin, and Gitman. “Young professionals who have never tried custom tailored clothing should come in and be fitted



for a new shirt and perhaps a pair of slacks,” Johnny says. “There is a wide variety in fabrics, and you do not have to buy the most expensive to look good. It is the fit that makes the difference, and we have something in every price range.”

“We offer a great apprenticeship program to any young man who is interested in men’s custom tailoring,” Terry adds.

So, whether your wallet’s fat or skinny, Thrasher’s Clothing can still have you *lookin’ sharp and lookin’ for love!* ■





The Pink Pelican

A Boutique Featuring Lilly Pulitzer

Written by: Kimberly Ballard Photos by: Sandy Ashley

They call it serendipity – the accidental discovery of something providential. Some of the greatest inventions of our time began this way: Post-It notes, Velcro, popsicles, and well – the Lilly Pulitzer print. Angie Kloote, owner of the Pink Pelican, the only Pulitzer-licensed boutique in the Tennessee Valley, loves to tell the story how the designer launched a 50-year fashion dynasty from an orange juice stand.

“Newly married to Peter Pulitzer, the grandson of publisher Joseph Pulitzer, Lilly had wealth and notoriety, but she was bored,” Angie explains. “In spite of being a New York socialite, she was always very down-to-earth. Peter suggested she take oranges from his groves in Florida and start an orange juice stand.” The story goes that Lilly set up in Palm Beach’s fashionable Worth Avenue shopping district, but daily juice squeezing led to fruit-stained clothes. She approached a friend about making her a shift that wouldn’t show stains. Though the shift was originally designed to wear over her existing clothes, she began wearing the brightly colored prints alone. The Lilly Pulitzer “shift dress” made its debut in 1959 and became a sensation after Lilly’s good friend Jacqueline Kennedy wore one on the cover of *Life* magazine.

“It really is all about the dress,” Angie smiles, “not only because the shift dress is still in style and a staple of any woman’s wardrobe, but because of the quality of the fabrics and workmanship, and because the cheerfulness of her prints simply make you feel good.” Angie explains, “When you buy a Lilly, you are buying a classic style that is enduring and on which you will receive many compliments.”

The Klootes did their research before opening the Pink Pelican and determining their clothing lines. “We found that people in Huntsville wanted more choices in shopping.” As higher-end boutiques topped the list of options, Angie says, “Once I looked into Lilly Pulitzer, I didn’t look much further.” Angie comes from a corporate background, an environment not traditionally associated with colorful fashion. Ele Armstrong, Angie’s longtime friend and current sales associate, suggested Angie liven up her wardrobe with the likes of Lilly Pulitzer. “When I saw the bright, beautiful dresses, swimwear, sleep wear, menswear, and children’s line, I knew it was exactly what Huntsville needed and I began to change my own wardrobe to happier colors,” said Angie.



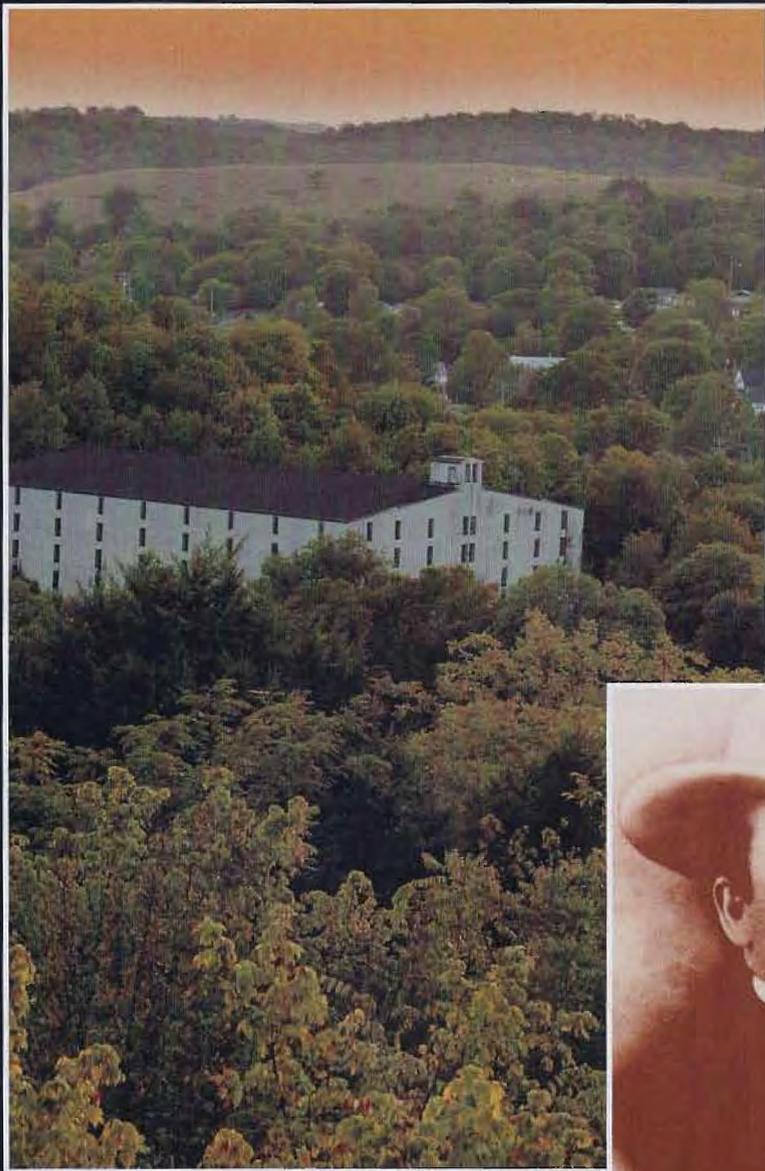


The Pink Pelican carries several other clothing lines in addition to Lilly Pulitzer. For women they carry Yoana Baraschi, Shoshanna, Tracy Reese, and Rebecca Taylor. Lilly is highly popular with college students, and is often shown at trunk shows prior to sorority rush. "It is said every sorority girl must have at least two Lilly Pulitzer dresses," Angie laughs. For girls in between ages and young teens, Angie suggests Betsy Johnson; for men, Lilly and the very popular Vineyard Vines. The Pink Pelican also carries a large selection of accessories, bags, jewelry, candles and aromatherapy products. In addition to Lilly Pulitzer shoes, they will soon carry the world's hottest flip-flops by Havaiana.

The vivacious personality of the Pink Pelican is described by Angie as built on a tripod: "The first leg is exceptional customer service. We want our customers to be happy with their purchases and feel good when they wear them. The second leg is to provide brands that are hard to find but in demand, and the third leg provides a unique and pleasant shopping experience from the upbeat atmosphere of the staff to the sweet scents and pleasing design of the store." The sales associates contribute much to the unique shopping experience. Beyond simply assisting with sizes and styles, "we listen to our customers," says associate Ele.

At the Pink Pelican, a customer looking for just the right dress for a special occasion will receive help not only in choosing the dress that looks best and most flattering, but also in adding the perfect shoes and accessories to make a fabulous fashion statement. According to owner Angie Kloote, "After all, it's our motto here at the Pink Pelican: "It is all about the dress!" ■





JACK DANIEL'S



Written by Kimberly Ballard

Less than an hour north of Huntsville, situated off the beaten path, there is a tiny slice of pure Americana in Lynchburg, Tennessee. The hometown of the original Jack Daniels Distillery attracts more than 250,000 people each year who visit the distillery and its historic surroundings, which memorialize its hardworking, but temperamental, local legend and celebrates his amber legacy that remains virtually unchanged since the 1830s.

with whom he was living. The preacher's congregation threatened to replace him if he didn't get out of the whiskey making business." Call taught Jack that the indigenous iron-free spring water was perfect for brewing whiskey. Jack then "added some techniques of his own and [with] whiskey being a cash business; he soon did very well for himself."

In 1866, whiskey wasn't just for drinking. Also used as a powerful anesthetic and painkiller, Jack loaded up his covered wagon with his own special blend and transported it to where Union and Confederate troops were fighting over control of the railroad. Legal, but unavailable on store shelves, Jack sold his unique Tennessee Whiskey for medicinal purposes as well as for drinking, offering it to buyers on both sides of the battlefield.

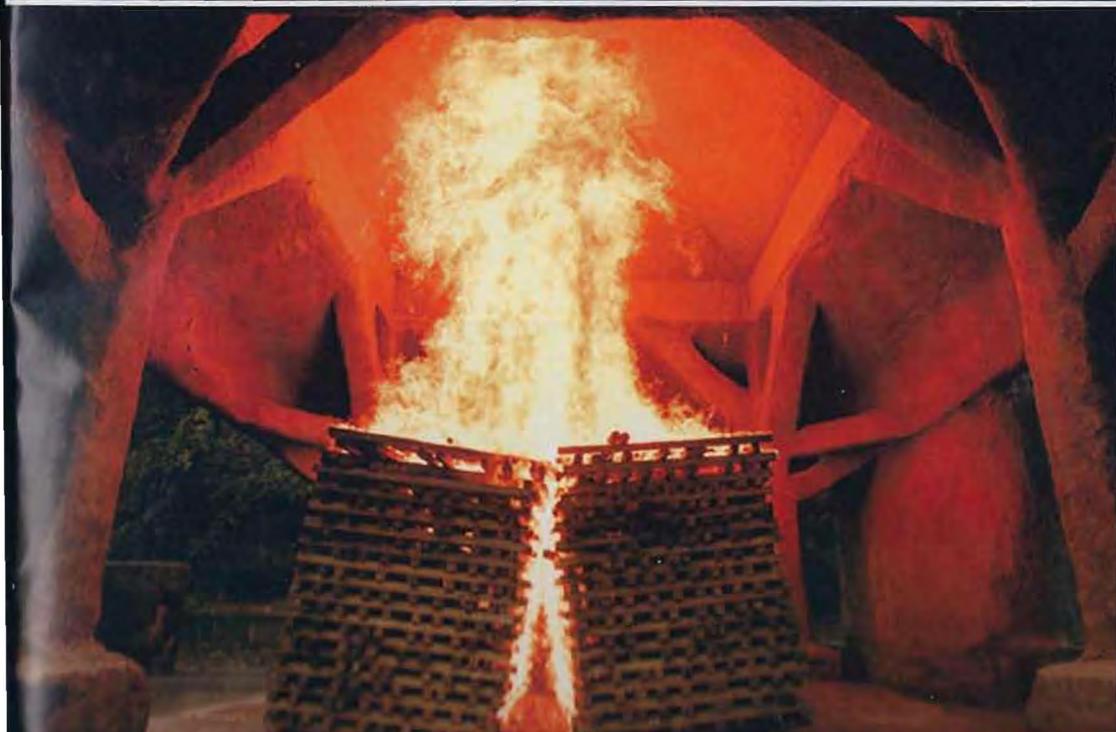
A visit to Lynchburg today begins with a free tour of the distillery, which still utilizes the basic techniques and recipe that Jack had implemented. "It begins with the delicious, fifty-six degree spring water mixed with the corn, malted barley, and



"Jasper Newton Daniel came from a family of thirteen children. In those days, it wasn't unusual to live with friends or extended family, in order to lessen the financial strain," says Jack Daniel historian, Nelson Eddy. "He bought the business from Dan Call, a Lutheran minister

rye," says Jeff Arnett, Master Distiller. The tour includes a visit to the abundant underground spring, the barrelhouse holding over 20,000 barrels of whiskey holding, and the rickyard where the hard, sugar maple is burned to make the charcoal used in the mellowing process. "We have seventy-seven warehouses of whiskey aging at any one time," Arnett says. Visitors can also see Jack's first office that still houses the old metal safe he purportedly kicked in a temper tantrum, breaking his big toe. The injury caused an infection that led to the amputation of his leg and later blood poisoning, from which he succumbed in 1911 at 61 years old.

"The distillery tour is free and entertaining for the entire family," says Steve May, director of Lynchburg Homeplace Services, which oversees tourism. "But afterwards, tourists find Lynchburg to be a quaint and historic little town where there is much to see and do." Walk around the city square and eat lunch at Miss Mary Bobo's Boarding House, owned by Jack's great-grandniece,



Lynne Tolley, or shop at the Lynchburg Hardware and General Store where you can challenge the townsfolk to a friendly game of checkers. It carries work from local artists and a full line of Jack Daniel's merchandise. You can also enjoy a drink at the White Rabbit Saloon, a reconstruction of Jack's original pub built before Prohibition, or visit his gravesite where two cast-iron chairs still provide a place where the local ladies can mourn Lynchburg's most eligible bachelor!

"Our best kept secret is the many venues we offer for parties, business meetings, corporate getaways, family reunions, and weddings. We have a pavilion and plenty of meeting space," May says. "For a small town, we always have something going on from summer barbeques to bluegrass bands playing in the square. A visit to Lynchburg is truly a richly rewarding experience." ■



Something Old, Something New

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photos by Chris Jensen

It was the center of the community in 1879. The new Harrison Brothers Hardware store located on the Southside of the city Square was the place to go for tobacco products, farming and gardening tools, toys for the kids, and housewares. You could replace a broken bridle, pick up an extra saddlebag for a ride to Decatur, or grab a mill cake of gunpowder. The children goggled over the hard candy while the womenfolk found the best bargains on popular utilitarian Queensware crockery. Harrison Brothers was the Walmart of its day. Today, it is one of Huntsville's most prized historical museums and unique southern shopping experiences.

After John, the last of the Harrison brothers, died in 1983 the Historic Huntsville Foundation bought the store. In 2007, Ginger Cobl joined the Foundation as the store manager and buyer. She sought to maintain as much of the rustic beauty of the past as possible, while focusing on merchandise that cannot be found anywhere else, and that reflects Huntsville's rich history and southern charm.

The storefront window-dressing features the pastoral artistry of area painters and artisans. A real brass bell tinkles over the door when you enter and the click of designer heels ring hollow on the original floorboards dating back to 1834. The east wing of the store is a hodgepodge of interesting remnants from early 20th century life, including the butt end of a half-smoked turn-of-the-century cigar and an old Edison light bulb dating to about 1903. Packed with sometimes trivial, but nonetheless timeless objects found in the original store, an old sliding ladder gives access to the upper shelves where the priceless antiques are on display.

"I was walking through the store one day like I have hundreds of times before, when something caught my eye for the first time," Cobl laughs. "Good grief, whose teeth are those!" The volunteer working the shop assured Cobl the grisly set of molars, a vestige of John and Daniel's father, Robert Harrison, had always been there. "Just like in a museum, you will find something you have never noticed, every time you visit."





The west wing of the store is a unique blend of the old and the new. Find distinctive gifts for college students, gourmet cooks, newlyweds, and the hard-to-buy-for. Browse the scented candles and handmade soaps. Experience the unique selection of M.C.'s Hallelujah Hands pottery out of Florence; EarthBorn dinnerware by Tena Z. Payne; and exclusive Sas-y Servers designs. From rustic oils on canvas by Eloise Schneider to whimsical lamps made from articles straight out of the toolbox, Harrison Brothers has gifts for the whimsical, the sophisticated, the traditional, and for children.

Run completely by volunteers, the proceeds go to the Historic Huntsville Foundation to help keep Harrison Brothers a most remarkable shopping experience! ■

Fear not, for there is plenty of unique merchandise for the diverse shopper: handmade jewelry made from 200 million-year-old rocks from the Volga River; Huntsville's famous FredBread; a variety of all-natural Lowcountry brand gazpacho, chutney, salsa, soups, pickles, and preserves; Lodge pre-seasoned cast iron cookware, and colorful books on local history, cooking, and sports.

Turn the corner and find a fully functioning hand-operated rope elevator and stacks of the store's original bank ledgers, merchandise catalogs, and inventory records. The original Harrison Brother's safe gapes open like from a scene in an old spaghetti western bank robbery. A well-documented selection of agate marbles, artful knobstoppers, and antique key plates complete with skeleton keys sit alongside Harrison Brother's famous, old-fashioned candy store section.



A Class in Itself Huntsville's Slice of European Style

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photos by Gary Patterson

Wilhela Cushman, former fashion editor of Ladies Home Journal once wrote, "Just around the corner in every woman's mind - is a lovely dress, a wonderful suit, or entire costume, which will make an enchanting new creature of her."

When you round the corner of Airport Road where it connects with Whitesburg Drive, European Boutique beckons in the sunlight against the north face of the Village on Whitesburg. Let the fashionable instincts inside your mind answer that alluring whisper - wispy skirts, loose fitting blouses, perhaps a crushy belt with a new pair of earrings and a matching Italian handbag and shoes.

European Boutique is a magical place for women not just because of the comfortable yet fashionable clothes, but because shop owner, Wanda Przekwas, and her two long-time fashion consultants, Peggy Wicks and Cindy Saseen, provide a unique perspective and personal touch to the way they engage their customers. "We know what women want. Our customers expect us to help them decide what looks best on them, and if they are buying for a particular event, help them decide what ensemble works best for that venue," Wanda says.

"You would be surprised at how honest we are," Wicks laughs.

"I have actually said to customers, 'Uh-uh. That does not suit you. Let's try something else,'" says Przekwas.

"And our customers like that - they even expect it," Wicks adds. "They had much rather hear it from us who will help them pick out something that better flatters them. It isn't about making a sale - it's about the customers feeling good about themselves." European Boutique is unique because shoppers can accessorize their new purchases without shopping all over town for a matching scarf, belt, handbag, or complementary costume jewelry. When Przekwas goes

flexibility to create an entirely different outfit by mixing and matching a skirt with a pair of coordinated slacks, or changing up a pair of shoes and adding a vest or jacket, makes European Boutique particularly exceptional.

As one customer says, "... European Boutique ... carries clothes that boast of taste and elegance. Perfect for church or a casual dinner out ... European Boutique is a sort of a hidden treasure."

"Our merchandise is not necessarily 'European' in that it is expensive and trendy, but rather it is a loose fitting, relaxed style for mature women who are still interested in being colorful and stylish, but whose lifestyle has become less complicated," she explains. "We concentrate on affordable, washable fabrics with durability and wearability - all traditional aspects of European style. Our customers are more interested in clothes that are comfortable, easy to launder, and practical. You find smart styles you will not see at other stores around town."

Chalet, Comfy USA, and Liz and Jane are excellent examples of European Boutique's all-season, relaxed-fit panache. They even carry designer sunglasses and offer free





comfortable, easy to launder, and practical

alterations on all clothes bought in-store. After having a stake in European Boutique for 25 years and owning the shop for the past 10 years, Przekwas is proud that most of their customers become repeat customers.

So next time you feel the magnetism and desire to morph into a chic and enchanting creature of elegance and grace, heed the attraction of the European Boutique. ■

"It isn't about making a sale — it's about the customers feeling good about themselves."





Carrabba's Italian Grill

Southern Italy at Parkway Place

Written by Kimberly Ballard | Photos by Chuck Mitchell

With great food on the table, a spirit of giving back to the community, and a warm "Our home is your home" invitation, Carrabba's Italian Grill opened at Parkway Place Mall four years ago. Adding Southern U.S. hospitality to those key ingredients, Carrabba's has garnered loyal patronage from all over Madison County. Rated the busiest of 231 locations in the Southeastern region for two consecutive weeks last December, the Huntsville Carrabba's has helped raise more than \$2.5 million for numerous local charitable organizations.

"This is what Johnny Carrabba, his Uncle Dennis, and Grandpa Grace Mancola intended for Carrabba's when they opened the first restaurant on Kirby Drive in Houston, Texas in 1986," says Marc Neselrode, owner and operator of the Huntsville location. "They wanted a casual and lively dining atmosphere with huge bowls of pasta and Italian fresh green salads. Pop grilling on a wood-burning stove while Mama greets guests out front. It is the Sicilian way."

One cannot talk about Carrabba's success without mentioning the unique Southern Italian cuisine. Though the restaurant is open only for dinner, except on Sundays, and for private events, a Carrabba employee's day begins at 8:00 a.m. Everything is made fresh daily. "Every sauce is taken straight from Grandpa Grace's Sicilian recipe book," Neselrode says. "Even the crostinis are freshly chopped, toasted, drizzled with garlic butter and seasonings, and re-toasted. The soups and salads are made fresh by hand every day, as are desserts and salad dressings."

Carrabba's favorites include not only classics like veal piccata and lasagna, but also Italian-style grilled salmon and grilled chicken. "Whenever we get first-time customers into the restaurant, we make it a point to send them a free sampler of ours for their to taste. Our grilled food is always a hit," Neselrode says.

In 1995, OSI Restaurant Partners bought the rights to franchise the Carrabba's chain, but the family still operates the two original Houston locations. Johnny Carrabba himself visited Huntsville for the grand opening and was impressed by Huntsville's unique melting pot community.



Marc Neselrode, Kelly Knight, Elizabeth Perez, Chris Tucker

According to Nesselrote, "Johnny said he felt as though he were speaking to the United Nations rather than a crowd of North Alabama residents."

Apropos to a city filled with brilliant engineers, the Huntsville Carrabba's location is in some ways, an engineering marvel. Nesselrote, a restaurateur since 1987, explains, "We had been considering bringing a Carrabba's to Huntsville for some time. In looking for a location, Parkway Place had just remodeled and approached us about locating on the first floor of the mall," he explains. "Carrabba's are always freestanding buildings. Also, we had visibility issues with being on the first floor; yet, being in such a high traffic area just off the Parkway, we began contemplating how we could make it work."

Discussions ensued on how to build a Carrabba's on the second level for the needed visibility. "At first, we were told it couldn't be done." Of course, Huntsville engineers didn't take 'no' so easily. Standing on the roof and upper parking deck, one of the engineers looked over the edge and pointed to the spot that, sure enough, worked. Parkway Place strung a banner across the lower parking area announcing that Carrabba's was coming to Huntsville, and the inquiries poured in. The Parkway Place location was built on four columns, independent of the mall structure, so that it is technically freestanding after all.

With Huntsville's city center expanding westward, many wonder whether Carrabba's has any intentions of opening out at Bridge Street. "We will probably target Madison sometime in the next five years," Nesselrote says.

For the past couple of years, Carrabba's has hosted Marketplace Leadership Luncheons every Thursday. The meetings, bringing the business community together, have grown to a group of over 100 on any given Thursday. The success of these and other events has inspired Carrabba's to test-market their new Large Party Carry-Out & Delivery program and Private Luncheons. For more information about how to make business meetings better by inviting Carrabba's to the table, contact them at (256) 288-1333. ■





Jeff McCarley & Melissa Ridley

Artisans salon spa

*Written by Kimberly Ballard
Photos by Chuck Mitchell*

The Artisans SalonSpa experience is like an artist's palette. A myriad of colorful products and services await the magical touches of each of the individual artists – hairstylists, color specialists, massage therapists, pedicurists, nail technicians, cosmetologists, and apprentices.

“TV shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear* have brought it to the forefront that movie stars and TV celebrities always look good because they have professional stylists and makeup artists who make them look that way,” says

Artisans managing partner, Melissa Ridley. “Most people do not need a full-time personal stylist, but enjoy knowing that they can receive personalized pampering and makeover services that leave them feeling good about themselves at a full-service salon and spa like Artisans.”

The journey begins with a few strokes of highlighting from the Color Bar. While you wait for the color to set, enjoy a cool glass of fresh lemonade or a soothing hot tea, and don't be surprised if a therapist walks by and gives your hands and fingers a gentle kneading. Mix it up with a relaxing shampoo, conditioning treatment and scalp massage, a snip here and a dab of volumizing tonic there. Follow with a sweeping blow-dry, a mottled squirt of this, and scrunching of that from a creative stylist, and you are a sketch of an evolving masterpiece.

But wait...you aren't through yet. You have only experienced the first floor layer. Take a trip upstairs to the second-level spa where the relaxation and revitalization



begins. Entering the spa is like walking into another realm, immediately shutting out the busyness and chattering of the salon below. The mood is quiet. The atmosphere is sensual. The gentle trickling of a water element is unobtrusive in the background. A comforting cup of hot tea, and the transformation is underway.

Cushions and throw pillows deck the pedicure bench. Several private cubbies for massage lie off the main corridor, each with pocket doors that open so couples can enjoy dual massages. Again, in an experience like a painter's palette, you can choose from a variety of 30-, 60-, and 90-minute massages, depending on your needs: aromatherapy, Swedish massage, warm stone and deep tissue, as well as sports and pregnancy massages.

Following your massage, an entirely new menu of spa services await: Himalayan rejuvenation, body scrubs, Caribbean therapy, skin polishing, rosemary and mint body wraps, stress relief back and scalp treatments, and a Steamy Wonder detox tent.



was an architectural challenge replacing an unsightly load-bearing support pole with a load-bearing beam, then building a second-floor spa from scratch with an entirely different ambience.

Jeff, an experienced stylist, felt efficiency was important, particularly in processes with downtime for the stylists and wait-time for the customers. By utilizing a handful of apprentices and assistants who do the shampooing and conditioning, fill-in color, and a variety of other processes, stylists can assist more than one customer at a time and proficiently control customer interchange.

The design of Artisans follows the extremely eco-friendly and green-living Aveda corporate model. The warm yellow of the walls comes from the Aveda color palette, the stylist station partitions are made of poly resins, and the hot water runs on energy efficient heat pumps. Even the floors are made of recycled tires, several inches thick, so that they are easy to clean, with cushiony shock absorbency makes it easy on stylists who stand on their feet all day.

All of the equipment used at Artisans is high-tech, like the Roller Ball hair dryers that use an even distribution of heat without the blowing action that causes frizzing and color damage, and a computerized coloring system that stores the exact color match for your hair so the color is consistent on every visit. "Artisans is the flagship Aveda lifestyle salon," Melissa explains. ■

Now that you don't want to leave - fear not, because back downstairs, you will receive the final flourish. Artisans has an entire line of Aveda cosmetics and hair and nail care products. Add to that a sensory journey through Aveda's inspired collection of fragrant, non-synthetic oils that, when blended according to your preferences, create a signature perfume that perfectly matches your body chemistry!

When Artisans opened in October 2007 next to Fresh Market in the Village at Whitesburg, it was a new vision from an older concept. Professional stylist Jeff McCarley, Melissa's business partner, originally opened Artisans as an Aveda salon located off Bob Wallace and L&N Drive at Merchant's Walk. Melissa spent three years as an Aveda representative. She and Jeff discussed opening a new shop in a location with higher visibility.

Artisans is as unique in its atmosphere and efficiency as in its offerings. First, it is much larger than it appears - a two-story facility located in a one-floor building. Because Melissa and Jeff had their own vision for its décor and traffic flow, it





VV&W – A Historic Perspective on Huntsville Real Estate

Written by: Kimberly Ballard Photos by: Chuck Mitchell



It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship. Nancy Wilkinson, a college student from Georgia, accepted a summer internship on Redstone Arsenal, and on her first day, was waiting for her security clearance. Richard Van Valkenburgh, a local young man passing the summer as a security guard on Redstone Arsenal, escorted Nancy to her desk. "Well, I wasn't exactly a security guard," Richard balks. "I had a security clearance but they weren't that hard to get in those days, as long as you had never been arrested."

Richard and Nancy Van Valkenburgh have been married 46 years, and have owned Van Valkenburgh and Wilkinson Properties, Inc., since 1985. They are known for their outstanding contributions to Huntsville's historical preservation and to its growth and prosperity. Nancy is a founding member of the Historic Huntsville Foundation, an organization formed to preserve and protect historically and architecturally important structures in Huntsville and Madison County. Richard, whose family has lived in Huntsville for six generations, grew up in a house on Williams Avenue in what is now the Twickenham Historic Preservation District.

Richard's business experiences began in the family building material and construction business, started as a hardware store on South Side Square by his great-grandfather in 1864. It grew into Van Valkenburgh Brothers Huntsville Building Material Company. "It was pure manual labor, unloading trucks and hauling building materials," Richard recalls. Nancy's family was optimistic about her marrying a budding young businessman, though Nancy laughs as she recalls Richard dropping by her house, dead tired on the way home from work, prompting her mother to send him home to clean up.

Richard and Nancy formed Van Valkenburgh & Wilkinson Properties, Inc., drawing upon Richard's construction and commercial leasing experience, and Nancy's love for historical homes, which led to their specialization in unique historic properties. Nancy's sister, Sarah Wilkinson Hereford, became the firm's CPA, while Nancy's mother, Sibyl Wilkinson, took on the duties of office management. Their well-known VV&W logo originated from 1920's bronze plaques placed along the city's sidewalks as reminders of the Van Valkenburgh legacy of business and civic life. The rapidly growing VV&W agency, a leader in HAAR and the Alabama Association of Realtors, was producing gross sales of \$20 million in the Historic and Fine Homes Division by 1999.



As the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce promoted revitalization of downtown Huntsville, VV&W became the new commercial tenants of the historic Goldsmith family home at 204 Gates Avenue in September 2000. Built in 1883 for early land developers, the lovely structure has many features of “High-Victorian” Italianate style.

Richard and Nancy both have a true appreciation for older homes that fit well into the city’s overall history, though Richard explains that, for buyers, purchasing a historic home often means a large investment in renovations. While lovers of older homes and “fixer-uppers” think nothing of this expense, Nancy acknowledges that the work that goes into an older home, with floors that are not level and walls that are not straight, is not for everyone. Contemporary versions of traditional Southern architecture can also be excellent choices.

In addition to fine and historic homes, VV&W handles many mid-priced contemporary properties. Two of the Van Valkenburghs’ daughters, Sarah Lauren Kattos and Julie Lockwood, are VV&W agents who sell a wide variety of new and existing homes throughout the city. In 2006, the Van Valkenburgh sisters closed more than 75 transactions.

The VV&W family has helped to shape the community through civic duty as well as through real estate. Richard’s mother, Rosa Belle, is one of the founders of the Huntsville Botanical Garden, and is known for breeding daylilies and irises. Nancy’s mother, Sibyl, recently won a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Girl Scouts of America. Richard and his father each served as president of the Kiwanis Club’s Huntsville chapter. Richard is also known as a musician who performs contemporary and Celtic music at charity events all over North Alabama.

Van Valkenburgh & Wilkinson is the only local real estate agency listed in *Who’s Who in Luxury Homes*. In 1992, VV&W became one of only ten charter members of the Historic Real Estate Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. ■





ADVANCED — Laser Clinics

Written by Kimberly Ballard

Photos by Chuck Mitchell

Excitement over advancement in anti-aging technology lured Dr. Hayley DeGraaff away from family practice five years ago, and continued advancement in aesthetic medicine drives her future. According to Dr. DeGraaff, owner and Medical Director of Advanced Laser Clinics in Huntsville, "In the past five years since I opened my clinic, there has been an eighty percent growth in non-invasive cosmetic procedures."

Dr. DeGraaff first became interested in anti-aging treatment while she was an associate professor teaching geriatrics at UAB. "I felt medical science was on the brink of a number of procedures that would not only facilitate better ways to age, but that offered less drastic measures than plastic surgery, and more affordable alternatives in the early stages of aging."

Advanced Laser Clinics offer a wide range of aesthetic medical services. You can have removed any number of unsightly blemishes, moles, and hair, and reverse the effects of tattoos. You can experience naturally beautifying and relaxing therapies like massage, facials, waxing, chemical peels, and the very popular microdermabrasion. You can also have permanent make-up like eyeliner and lipstick applied.

Among the more specialized services, Advanced Laser Clinics offer several injectable cosmetic fillers that add volume and hydration to the skin to smooth wrinkles, creases, folds, "smile lines" and "restenoses" that form naturally over time.



products on the market are: Radiesse, injected into wrinkles like those found in the fold between the nose and mouth; Perlane®, used for deep marionette lines and soft wrinkles and folds; Restylane®, preferred around the mouth and popular in lip augmentation; and Juvéderm®, which instantly restores the volume of the skin. All four are safe and effective.

Discovered in 1949, developed for therapeutic use in the 1960s, and approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1989 to treat hemifacial spasms, *botulinum toxin*, known today as Botox, changed the aesthetic medicine industry in 2002. At that time, the FDA approved Botox Cosmetic for use in temporarily improving moderate-to-severe frown lines forming between the eyebrows in aging patients. For close to ten years, Botox has been a leading denervation technique for improving the appearance of “worry lines”, “frown lines”, “crow’s feet” and other dynamic wrinkles.

“The good news is that we are awaiting an exciting new Botox-type product that will rival Botox,” Dr. DeGraaff explains. “This product will offer competition, which in turn will bring the cost down, making it more affordable to more people.”

Non-invasive skin rejuvenation procedures like Régenique recapture the health and vitality of your original skin tone in a few short weeks. The procedure is not irritating or painful, and unlike some treatments, is not a temporary fix, repeated every few weeks. The cost is much less than surgical alternatives and its effects rival those of invasive procedures.

Advanced Laser Clinics use an amazing new treatment for acne, which is still the most common skin disease in the U.S. Acne can lead to permanent scarring and disfiguration if not treated, but Dr. DeGraaff applies a photosensitizing agent called Levulan to the infected area. The application is activated with a blue light to exfoliate the skin and unclog pores. This revolutionary Blu-Light treatment is the most effective on the market to date in reducing inflammation and clearing up acne.

For many years, aging women gave up on effective non-surgical treatments for those clusters of red, purple, or blue spider veins most commonly appearing on the thighs, ankles, and calves. Today, Dr. DeGraaff has a non-invasive treatment for spider veins called sclerotherapy. Injected into the veins, a sclerosing solution causes them to collapse and disappear.

Even as recently as the 1970s, people prayed they never looked down to find the pocked markings of cellulite because there was no known cure for the problem. Today, an amazing device called VelaSmooth™ is the first and only effective treatment of cellulite, using eLos™ combined energy technology to mobilize tissue and safely suction the affected area. This device re-contours the skin surface and eliminates cellulite.

Two of the most common problems women face are related to weight, and to the effects of menopause. Dr. DeGraaff offers innovative, safe and effective methods for treating both.

Bioidentical hormone replacement treatment (bHRT) uses synthetic hormones, manufactured in the lab to have the same molecular structure as those made in the human body, to replenish the loss of natural hormones during menopause. Dr. DeGraaff customizes bHRT according to individual needs. She sees highly successful results in women with menopausal symptoms.

Advanced Laser Clinics work closely with Advanced Weight Loss Clinics on safe and effective weight loss programs, but Dr. DeGraaff sees a breakthrough on the horizon: “In 2010, aesthetic medicine will see the release of a non-invasive weight loss technique called Liposonix, which is currently awaiting FDA approval.” She explains, “Liposonix is a non-surgical laser form of Liposuction that breaks up fatty tissue and dissolves it.”

Dr. DeGraaff says of her practice, “Anti-aging and aesthetic medicine is very rewarding. When people leave Advanced Laser Clinics, they are happy. They get back their self-confidence, and feel better about themselves.” ■



APPLIANCE DIRECT:

A Friendly, Homegrown Approach to Modern Appliances

Written By: Kimberly Ballard Photos By: Chris Jensen

Buying appliances today is about having many options, and those options can be confusing to customers. The professional sales staff at Appliance Direct has over 200 years of combined experience in appliance sales and service. Any Appliance Direct representative can help you decide what best fits your needs. Whether you are a single professional with a great need for quick and easy, or a family of eight where durability, high capacity, and versatility are paramount, Appliance Direct will show you options that fit your lifestyle and your budget.

Appliance Direct is well-known among Madison County appliance dealers for their friendly, attentive approach in helping customers. Anytime you visit, you will find an expert sales representative who can advise you. Whether you are remodeling your current home or building a new home from scratch, the authorities at Appliance Direct will show you the newest technology; advise you on the design that best fits your space; and recommend the highest quality appliances that meet your needs, enhance your lifestyle, and respect your budget.

When choosing appliances, there are many important aspects to consider. Appliances are no longer simply utilitarian necessities, but important contributors to the atmosphere and style of your home. Trained to help you merge the new with the old in order to enhance your current architecture, Appliance Direct representatives can also help you with countertops. Appliance Direct sells the highest quality marble and granite counter tops on the market. Representatives ensure that you are equipped with the safest cooking environment available on the market today and will help you adapt all your modern appliances to the charm of your existing home. In fact, Appliance Direct has supplied the appliances for over 75% of the Huntsville-Madison County Builder's Association Showcase homes.





The Appliance Direct commitment does not stop after the sale. Satisfaction which your purchase is ensured by Dealer and manufacturer's warranties backing every appliance purchased at Appliance Direct, and qualified parts and service technicians who respond promptly to customer needs. "Appliance Direct is known for price and remembered for service!"

Appliance Direct carries an extensive line of leading appliance brands and a large selection of grills for the barbeque enthusiast.

Visit Appliance Direct at their Huntsville location at 722 Church Street or in Athens at 802 Highway 72 West.

