

A 'stitch in time' means revenue for Lynn Rankin

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The adage "A stitch in time saves nine" holds an obvious truth to many a homemaker. But to Lynn Rankin, a homemaker and businesswoman in southern Chester County, "the stitch in time" seems to be just what the family business needs. To clear up this confusing statement, let's see how Lynn explained the situation herself.

"When we moved to this area a little over four years ago, this store was a grocery business. It didn't take very long to realize that was about the worst investment we could have made and we had to close it. With an empty store we gave a lot of thought to what we could use it for. Quite a few people mentioned to us they felt there was a need for a fabric store in the area since you have to drive for quite a ways in any direction to find one. When my girls were younger, I used to sew a lot for them and myself, mostly by hand, since I didn't own a machine then I've always loved needlework, embroidery, crewel."

"So, opening the fabric-needlework shop seemed like a logical thing to do. We opened last May. The number of customers that we are seeing each day has greatly increased since that time and it looks like the business is going to go well," she said.

Lynn lives with her husband Robert, a salesman and serviceman of organs, and also with their two younger children Jim and his wife Margaret, and their son

Jummy Paul and Andy, an eighth grader at the Oxford School District in southern Chester County. They also have two older daughters, Jinny, who lives in Georgia and Susie, who lives in Hawaii.

Lynn explained that the family lived, until very recently, in the Media area outside of Philadelphia. But it became too crowded for us and we have been much happier living out here in the country," she said.

Settling right into the activities of the area, Lynn and her family became members of various organizations. Lynn belongs to Farm Women of Chester County, and for a time also belonged to Russellville Grange 91.

Lynn said she spent the last fourteen years as a news correspondent in the Chester-Delaware Valley area. She said, "I had to give this up just about a month ago because I found there just wasn't time for both the store and the newspaper work anymore. I really enjoyed the working and had my letter of resignation on my desk for a long time before I finally handed it in."

She added, "It was a hard decision because I also love to write, but it is better to do one thing right than do two of them halfway." "When I think about it, I've done a lot of things in the past from being a receptionist, a switchboard operator, to working as a desk sergeant in a small town police station. But running my own fabric business is the most enjoyable thing I've done."

These jobs, all relating directly



A Stitch in Time is a good piece of advice that Lynn Rankin took to heart in her business ventures by naming her fabric shop the same. Here, the hungry customer can find not only

material to suit her needs, but sewing workshops, sewing designs and ideas, and even a place to get her scissors sharpened.

to working with the public, have probably given Lynn invaluable training in operating a store.

She said, "I have always enjoyed people and I guess that is a big asset in being in your own business. Before going into the grocery business, I'd never had any experience handling the books, ordering and all the little things that go into your own business. I'm not too keen on scrubbing the floor, but it's all part of the business!"

Lynn is an energetic, sometimes comical shopkeeper. Not that she is in any sense of the word a comedian, but her down-to-earth evaluations and matter-of-fact summaries often contain a touch of wit. Most of the time, however, she is very serious about her tasks and the concerns of her customers.

Her shop, called "Stitch in Time" is housed in part of the family's large old brick and frame home at the corner of 896 and old Rte. 10 in Russellville.

In addition to offering a large selection of fabrics, notions, patterns, and tools of the trade such as sewing machine repairs and scissors sharpening, Lynn also maintains a large inventory of counted cross stitch supplies. "We carry more counted cross stitch than any other type of needlework because it is so popular right now," she explained. "We continually have to expand that department because of the many new items that are continually coming on the market."

Knowing what is popular and what the customers will buy are necessary ingredients of operating a store and, for Lynn, this was somewhat difficult to begin, but with the help of wholesalers and various salesmen who come to her store, she has built up an extensive inventory which she says she feels is basically sound.

"I've always been a fabricaholic" who can't resist buying at least one piece of fabric when I go into a fabric shop and, like many of my customers, I too have drawers full of pieces I'll get to one day. So imagine what it is like now when I go into a warehouse with shelves and shelves of lovely colors and prints. I have to keep totalling up the cost in my mind to hold myself back. We also have quite a few salesmen who come to the shop and it's hard to resist temptation.

"When I first went into business I was afraid that the materials I selected would not be the ones my customers would like, but I had good help in selecting the basics and soon learned to rely on my own judgment."

"I won't say I haven't picked a few that are turkeys, but from my

customers' comments I must be doing something right. It's something you have to learn fast — when we were in the grocery business we could eat our mistakes, but not here," she said.

Lynn readily admits that her husband is one of her biggest assets in the business because he not only helps to keep a tighter reign, but also helps out whenever she needs some work done in the store.

At the rear of the store, Lynn has a work area set up with sewing machine, iron and work table. She enjoys giving classes on crafts which include the very popular ribbon matching quilting and folded star crafts.

Lynn said of her own teaching, "I do like giving classes although I have never thought of myself as a teacher."

One thing this experience has taught me is that I can if I really want to. I'm making things for sale and for samples at the shop that I probably wouldn't have tried before, but now that I have to, I find that I can. I guess it is true when they say that necessity is the mother of invention."

Lynn has shared with our readers her directions for making the machine-stitched, strip-quilted pillow. The technique can also be applied to making placemats,

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Homestead Notes



Here Lynn displays the pillow she made using the machine strip quilting technique. This same technique can be used to make place mats, pillows and vests.



Here Lynn demonstrates the steps to assemble a quilt pillow. Stitch a strip of fabric face down upon the center square of a diamond-shaped piece. Flip over strip and finger press. Continue sewing strips around the center square to form a first row; then start a second.

Figure 1

Figure 2

