

There's No Place Like Home

June's Dancewear celebrates 35 years of homespun success.

BY BARBARA DONOHUE

For June Jamieson, who has been operating June's Dancewear in Arlington, TX, for the past 35 years, going to work is just like going home—literally. Long before it was a dance shop, the little green ranch house was home to her and her family for 15 years.

"[This is] the house we all grew up in," says Judy Jamieson-Goff, who is the fourth of Jamieson's five children and the manager of June's Dancewear. "When I was born, they bought this little house in Arlington." The family kept the property after they moved to another, and in 1970, Jamieson opened part of it as a dancewear store, selling such basics as black leotards, pink tights, ballet and tap shoes. "It was a very, very small inventory to start," Jamieson-Goff says.

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—June Jamieson

Now, the master bedroom is the dressing room. The two children's bedrooms have been opened up to make way for wall-to-wall adult dancewear, and double racks of children's leotards stand in the former kitchen. Pointe shoes are fitted in what was once a breezeway, and the garage has been converted into office and storage space.

When Jamieson bought the house in 1949, Arlington had only 7,000 people and it seemed far away from the neighboring cities of Dallas and Fort Worth. Now, she says, its population tops 350,000 and the area is part of the metroplex that has grown up around the two cities. "And we're still here, in the same little house," she says proudly.



Retail runs in the family: (right to left) June Jamieson, Judy Jamieson-Goff and Jamie Goff

Jamieson, who turned 81 this year, continues to work in the store a couple of hours every day. "I pay all the bills and do all the paperwork," she says. "I buy almost all the shoes and most of all the staple stuff—all the black leotards—but Judy buys the things the kids like. I work only part-time. More and more, Judy will be taking over and it will be her shop." Tamara Ivey, a college student, rounds out the staff as a part-time employee.

Jamieson-Goff started working at the shop around the time her daughter Jamie was born. "I'm an ex-school teacher. I came to help mom out three days a week and planned to go back to teaching, but I liked the flexible hours." She stayed on, often bringing her daughter to work. "She was kind of brought up here in the shop. Whenever she couldn't go to daycare...I'd bring her with me."

Today, Jamie refers to the store as her second home, and although she has pursued a career in microbiology, she still helps out during busy seasons.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Jamieson began the business with no prior experience. "I'd never worked in retail, or any kind of thing. I had been bringing up kids," she says. Her

youngest daughter was a dancer, and Jamieson had to travel to Dallas or Fort Worth to buy her shoes. "This was a problem because, especially for pointe shoes, she was very hard to fit," she recalls. "So one day I thought, 'Why don't I open up my own dancewear shop?' It was a decision made over a weekend, actually."

Starting out was a challenge, but Jamieson was confident. Although there were few local studios, the Arlington dance community needed a place to buy merchandise. "Dancewear was sold in shoe stores and you were just another customer if you were a dancer," she explains. "[Selling] dancing shoes takes a little bit more than that." The toughest hurdle was convincing wholesalers to work with her. "That was the hardest thing under the sun: to persuade them I was serious about what I was doing," she says. "They said, 'A lot of ladies think they want to open up stores without realizing how much work it entails.'"

SERVICE OR LOCATION?

No longer a small town, Arlington has found itself at the whirling center of two big cities, and June's is close to a major highway and two interstates, as well

Q & A

Transforming a family home into a family business

DRN: What were the logistics involved in converting your former house into a dance shop?

June Jamieson: We didn't have to do a whole lot. There were electrical and plumbing problems that we had to overcome. My husband did a lot of the renovation. We changed things, we tore out walls, cut holes in walls, things of that sort. It was pretty much a family project. And almost everything was done on a shoestring at first.

DRN: What were the special challenges of using your house as your store?

JJ: The biggest thing was "Oh, I hope nothing happens to it," because it was the first house we bought when we were a young couple with five kids. We moved out of there only because it was too small. But you always feel a certain tenderness toward the first place you bought, I think.

DRN: Were there zoning ordinances you had to deal with?

JJ: Not at that time. It had already been zoned for business [at that time, although] it wasn't when we moved here. Actually, this was almost a farm community with only 7,000 people. This was very remote when we bought the place.

DRN: Have you ever thought about moving into a more traditional space?

JJ: No. We get calls all the time from new shopping centers opening or new strips. I don't think I would move—why should I pay that high rent?

DRN: If you knew then what you know now, would you have done anything differently?

JJ: Oh, very, very little. It's worked out so well.

DRN: What is it like working in a place that you have so much attachment to?

JJ: You feel very much at home, the shop is a home to me. I'm going from one house to another house, one home to another home, and it never feels strange. If you work outside, you go home at night and you feel good about it. When I drive in to work, I feel good about it, even after all these millions of years.



as some popular attractions: the Texas Rangers' ballpark, the Six Flags Over Texas theme park and the Dallas Cowboys' soon-to-be-completed stadium. "We are a little bit doubtful about this 'location, location, location,'" says Jamieson. "We think that service is more important than location. I say that, but we just happen to have a great location."

Even so, she insists that people come for the service. "Unlike most stores where you walk in and you wait on yourself, here you are greeted at the door," Jamieson says. "We let the little kids pick out which color chair they want to sit in and

put their little jazz socks on and fit their little shoes." No one has to wander through the store wondering what kind of ballet shoe to buy. "We show them everything," Jamieson-Goff says. "We dress the children, we babysit, we entertain. We walk them to the board and let them shuffle. I don't know how you could do any more than we do for them."

COSTUME CALL

Costumes have turned out to be an important part of the store's offerings, Jamieson says. "If a kid



June Jamieson and the store cat, Pumpkin, delve into paperwork.

comes in and says [he or she needs] something in a hurry, Judy is absolutely fabulous at putting costumes together at the last minute. Halloween has gotten to be fun." Jamieson-Goff has crafted everything from cat ears to butterfly wings, and often dresses up dancewear to help customers create costumes for talent shows. "We carry a smattering of sequins and appliqués [to] dress up hot pants and things like that," she says.

SERVING GENERATIONS OF CUSTOMERS

Being in business in the same location for 35 years means that June's

Dancewear has built relationships not only with customers, but with their children and grandchildren as well. "Customers that we've waited on for three generations come in here. That's really the coolest thing about the store," says Jamieson-Goff.

Jamieson reflects on being part of the Arlington community. "How often people say, 'Oh, you're June's Dancewear,'" she says. "You meet them in the grocery store and the kids come up and say 'You put my shoes on me!'"

Barbara Donohue is a freelance writer based in Acton, MA.

JUST THE FACTS...

June's Dancewear
1921 East Arlington Street
Arlington, TX 76010
817-275-2303

HOURS: Monday–Thursday, 11 am–6 pm; Friday, 11 am–5:30 pm; Saturday, 10 am–3 pm. Closed Mondays during the summer.

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 1,700, plus 600 in an outbuilding

MERCHANDISE: Shoes, tights, leotards, lyrical skirts, coverups, dance sweaters, accessories, skating and gymnastics wear, and more

NUMBER OF MANUFACTURERS: at least 12

DÉCOR: Dancewear floor to ceiling

BEST-SELLING ITEMS: Black leotards and black dance pants

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS PER DAY: 20

AVERAGE SALE PER CUSTOMER: \$50–150

BUSIEST SEASON: Back-to-school

BIGGEST SURPRISE: The changes in dancewear and that dancewear is becoming fashionable

TOUGHEST CHALLENGE: Guessing what the next season's trends will be

GOAL FOR 2005–06: To maintain level of service and enthusiasm

STRANGEST CUSTOMER REQUEST: Tutus for rookie players on the Texas Rangers minor league baseball team