

Spotlight on:

The Blackstone Emporium

The Winn family has been in the furniture business since the early 1930's. Three of Franklin's brothers, Robert, Allie and Bernard Winn owned and operated Winn Furniture located at 101 North Main Street from the 1930's until it burned to the ground in 1965. At that time the store relocated to its present location on East Broad Street. In the early 1940's Franklin worked for his brothers selling and delivering furniture across the county. He switched to selling cars at Hammock & Rand Motor Co. on North Main Street where his fun-loving personality won him many friends and customers, but when the owners of Hammock & Rand Motor Co. decided to sell and relocate in 1980, Franklin, along with his son, Frankie, opened the Blackstone Emporium.

Starting from scratch, father and son purchased the original storefront located at 112 North Main Street in December 1980. They borrowed enough money to purchase the building as well as \$10,000 to stock the store with antiques, furniture, and novelties. The original showroom was 3300 square feet and was heated by a potbelly stove. Friends, family and former customers supported the store through its infancy and helped it to grow. Beth, Frankie's wife, joined the staff in 1987.

The size and scope of the store have changed over time. In 1984 the Winns purchased the Montgomery Ward Building located at the end of the block, using a portion for showroom and renting the remainder to local barbers. In 1992 the two buildings were joined together increasing the square footage to 32,000. The store expanded again in 2006 with the purchase of the storefront at 108 North Main (old Cole's Mens' Shop) which currently displays children's and medium-sized bedroom furniture. As the square footage increased, so did sales and offerings. The Blackstone Emporium currently sells retail home furnishing from over 100 manufacturers nationwide, specializing in medium to high-end goods.

Franklin passed away in 2004 but his legacy continues. He never knew a stranger and his customers were his friends. He taught the staff to receive customers with kind words, a smile and exceptional service. Today, everyone who visits the store gets VIP treatment.

When the store first opened, most furniture was manufactured in North Carolina or in plants east of the Mississippi River. Now, the majority of goods are produced overseas in China, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Asia. The industry is highly competitive at the wholesale and retail levels. Retailers have a much larger selection of product with regard to price and quality; however, profit margins are smaller due to rising costs of raw materials and transportation from overseas as well as the growing number of "big box stores" in neighboring cities.



The Emporium staff.

Getting to Know our Businesses

The Blackstone Emporium is unique in its style and approach to customers. Furniture is mostly traditional but with an eclectic flair. Young and older customers can find items that are useful, stylish, and affordable. Frankie and Beth shop the High Point Market in North Carolina annually looking good

values. They offer free decorating consultation to customers who request it. They try to educate customers on various types of quality and care of furniture. If they need assistance with repairs and replacements, the staff will honor all manufacturers' warranties. Some repairs are done on-site while others are sent to local upholsterers and craftsmen.

Customer satisfaction is very important to the Emporium's success. Customers are treated like friends and family. Their mission statement focuses on providing a friendly environment where customers can buy quality furniture at affordable prices and expect quality service from the entire staff.

The Emporium's customer base includes residents from Blackstone, Kenbridge, South Hill, Petersburg, Lawrenceville, Emporia, Colonial Heights, Richmond, and the counties of Nottoway, Amelia, Brunswick, Lunenburg, Prince Edward, and Chesterfield. They advertise on cable TV in 4 counties as well as in Colonial Heights and Petersburg. However, word of mouth is still their best form of advertisement. They value their loyal customer base.

The majority of the Emporium's clientele tends to be the Baby Boomer but they have a growing number in the X and Y gen customers. Their ability and willingness to "special order" furniture in many styles, finishes and fabrics has allowed them to expand their client base. They assist customers in creating their own sense of style. Beth says, "If they can describe it or show it to us in a magazine, we will try to recreate it."

In the last few months, the Emporium has expanded their bedding gallery. They currently offer the Winndom Collection by Custom Comfort, Ltd. as well as the Kathy Ireland Collection by Therapedic. Both allow them to offer a wider range of selection, price and custom needs.



Frankie Winn shows a customer what to look for in a well-made sofa.

