

Fabricare Canada

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009 - VOL. 53, NO. 1

WWW.FABRICARECANADA.COM



Surviving 80 years of
changing markets

Canadian Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 40023249
Return Undelivered Address Blocks to Box 968, Oakville, ON L6J 5E8



Careful Hand: 80 years old

Above: Brian, Risa, Bari and Jacob Chelsky with Brenda and Sid Chelsky at right.

Surviving for 80 years is an accomplishment for any business, but in the fabricare field it is especially notable when it is owned by one family. To survive for 80 years, managers have to deal with changes in the market and adapt to new technologies. And be right more times than they are wrong. Here is a brief history of the survival of Careful Hand Laundry & Dry Cleaning from 1929 to 2009.

HAND-FINISHED LAUNDRY

The company was started by Russian immigrants Jack and Alex Shindman, who moved to Toronto bringing with them the skills learned working in a cousin's laundry in Chicago. They started a small operation specializing in the hand finishing of shirts and table linen. The work was laundered off-site and returned for hand ironing.

Their reputation for quality finishing reached the ear of a custom shirtmaker who commissioned the company to wash and finish all his new shirts. Because Careful Hand Laundry charged a premium price (since new shirts are hard to iron) the company acquired a reputation for hand finishing and high prices.

The Shindman brothers astutely capitalized on this market niche, and 80 years later it is still the core of Careful Hand's success. Over the years the business grew, moving several times and acquiring its own laundry equipment, but always staying close to Toronto's upscale Rosedale area.

had outgrown its Avenue Road plant and Sid made the decision to move to an industrial building on Tycos Drive. He served the majority of his core retail customers by depots and routes, and expanded the commercial laundry into a considerably larger space. At the same time he became a supplier to

other Chelsky children now pursue careers in other fields.

ONE MORE MOVE

In 1995, Brian decided Careful had outgrown its Davenport Road location and, over Victoria Day weekend, moved the entire operation to a larger location on Dufferin Street. His design of the new plant received an award in the annual Plant Design Contest held by the *American Drycleaner* magazine. In order to maintain a base near his former plant, a franchised store was opened on Dupont Street.

Today, Brian Chelsky concentrates on serving and building his customer base of clients who appreciate the hand finishing and high standards that have always been a hallmark of Careful Hand. He was a pioneer in internet advertising and can credit an impressive amount of business directly to Careful's website. He is highly computerized, keeping in close touch with his customers and watching his database to identify and reward good customers. The company does not run specials, and has increased its prices every year. At present a two-piece suit is \$35, shirts on hangers are \$4.95 and hand-folded shirts are \$5.40 each.

IN CONCLUSION

Eighty years ago the Shindman brothers identified a market niche and built a successful business, which endured through the Depression, war, and economic ups and downs. Today, with Sid taking advantage of marketing opportunities as they come along and achieving success in them, third-generation Brian is operating a 21st-century version of the original concept. The lesson in the story of this one family enterprise might be to

have a core idea, adapt it to the circumstances and opportunities that come along, but don't deviate from the basic philosophy of your business. ■

The company acquired a reputation for hand finishing and high prices.

MARRYING THE BOSS'S DAUGHTER

The next manager came into the business as a high school kid working part-time. His eye was caught by Alexander Shindman's pretty daughter Brenda and soon they were dating. Later they married and the kid, Sid Chelsky, was taken into the firm in 1961.

During the 1960s, Careful started a service of laundering and ironing clothes and linens for summer camps. This became an important source of income during the slower summer months and had the added benefit of attracting new customers, as the campers' parents saw the care that the company had taken with their children's clothes.

GROWTH UNDER A NEW GENERATION

In 1971 Sid and Brenda acquired the company and expanded into the commercial laundry business. Sid, now president, began a modernization and improvement program, which resulted in a 20% reduction in laundry labour. It also started a long association with Dalex, which remains Careful's major equipment supplier to the present day.

By the 1980s the company

the hospitality industry. After visiting Japanese plants, Sid adopted their practice of offering Sunday service to his hospitality sector clients. This resulted in a substantial increase in volume.

ENTER THE NEXT GENERATION

Oldest son Brian joined the business in 1986 as manager of the retail division. Realizing the importance of having a major presence close to his core market, he was able to rent a high-profile location on Davenport Road and install dry cleaning and shirt equipment there. He built this location by producing high-quality work and implementing a strong marketing program. He also became involved in the environmental movement, both as an instructor in Ontario's educational program and as a dry cleaner setting high standards in his own plant.

By this time the commercial laundry division was declining, so Sid and Brenda split the company and sold off the commercial laundry. Sid became a consultant to the laundry industry. His son Brian and wife Risa purchased the dry cleaning operation. One daughter works in a Careful Hand store. The

THE OTHER DIMENSION

Although operating a fabricare plant is a full-time job, this family has found time to give back both to their community and the industry. Jack Shindman was active in many Jewish service organizations. Sid Chelsky continued this involvement, including serving as national president of the Canadian Associates of Ben Gurion University.

In addition, both Sid and Brian have been active and held the presidency in the Ontario associations (DCLI now OFA) and both have been active in the ECLDA, Sid as president and Brian currently as 1st vice-president.

They have also participated in the Ontario environmental programs, receiving a P4 Pollution Prevention Award and taking part in environmental hearings. Brian is an instructor in the environmental training program offered by Seneca College.

In a wider context, Sid was president of the Better Business Bureau of Metro Toronto and chair of the Industrial Accident Prevention Association of Ontario, Textile Division. In addition, the company sponsors youth teams in various sports.