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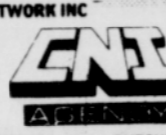
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BUSINESS

Business Profile: Farris Fashions

Last July 21st marked the culmination of years of planning and dreaming for Mel Farris of Farris Fashions. The store, which features "high tech" fashion, was financed totally by his own savings. "My biggest challenge was convincing myself that the time is right, this year-1990," said Farris. "I saved money all through the '80's because I knew it would be hard to get capital. I started with all my own financing." Farris already successful at two other careers: teaching mathematics at Mt. Hood Community College and in his real estate rental business. But owning a high fashion clothing store was something he dreamed about for years. "I get compliments at work and on my leisure time in night clubs, etc. on the way I dress. I've always had a good eye for fashion," he added.

The unique store features clothes for men and women on the cutting edge of fashion, from radical to high tech. "We have fashions will are here in Portland now, not three years form now." A customer will encounter the "En-Vogue" sheer, see-through style, three-quarter length suits with matching pants like Prince wears, snakeskin shoes, designer stockings with tiger & dragon patterns in black and gold, silk pants, as well as more conservative styles of dresses and suits. "I thing we caught a lot of Portlanders off guard," commented Farris. "And because it's a small store with low overhead, we have very reasonable prices."

The fashions come from New York, Georgia and Los Angeles with the help of Farris' buyer and aunt Louise Brooks. She is assisted by another family member, Mel Farris, Jr. Farris' aunt and son help him keep up on the hottest styles, and he attends many of the trade shows himself.

Another service that is unique to Farris Fashions is provided by Mel's girlfriend and designer, Vivian Hickmon. She designs women's fashions and custom designs and places snakeskin additions to silk garments to a customer's specifications. Salesman De Andre Smith helps customers with their selections.

Farris is philosophical and optimistic about the future of his store. "If it does fail it doesn't mean I'm a failure-I've had quite a few successes already in my life. And I have no reason to believe it will be anything but a success. Just one of the many things I've accomplished," he said.

And what does he consider his greatest success? "The biggest thing I accomplished is my high school diploma. It's still hanging on the wall in my office (at Mt. Hood Community College.) It was the first certificate that showed that I completed an educational program, which means a lot to someone who flunked the fifth grade." Farris cites Bobby Kennedy as an inspiring figure. "He flunked the fourth grade. But one failure doesn't mean you're a failure. You have to add all of your successes as well and then balance them," he commented.

After high school Farris went on to get a 2-year degree in Electrical Engineering from Mt. Hood, a 4 year degree in the same subject from Oregon Institute of Technology, and a master's degree in education from Cal. State.

"Another success I really appreciate is my pride and joy sport: basketball," added Farris. As a junior and senior at Jefferson High School, his team won the city title both years. "I was quite talented in basketball. I went on to Mt. Hood and made honorable mention All-American and did the same thing at the Oregon Institute of Technology. I still hold the northwest scoring title of averaging 29 points per game in one season (while at Oregon Tech.)" Farris also had an NBA tryout with the Indiana Pacers and tryout offers with other teams. He could also have gone overseas and played professional basketball. "But I had my teaching job. It was chancy to keep trying out. I went for security," recalled Farris. He went on to coach basketball for six years at Mt. Hood Community College.

Although this is Farris' first venture into a retail business, he feels his planning has paid off. "I'd been gearing myself for the day throughout the '80's. My style of dress helps me with ordering and my knowledge of math helps with accounting and bookkeeping," he stated. "And the last six months I've gained considerable knowledge in the retail industry. I'm continually learning all the time.

Farris is satisfied with living and working in Portland, and has lived in north Portland for the last seven years. "I've thought about moving back to Los Angeles several times, but Portland is the kind of place where there is opportunity. You can be what you want to be anywhere but it's easier in Portland," he said. "Most aspects of living in Portland are easier than in cities like L.A. Like buying groceries and driving to and from work. It's a much better lifestyle. I wouldn't be able to do the things I do or own the things I own in L.A."

Mel Farris also sees Portland as a place where he can contribute to the community. "Black businesses are very important. In the '50's there were more black-owned businesses in Portland than there are today. But I don't want black people coming to my store just because I'm black. I'd prefer they come to the store for the high tech fashions at low prices. And I like to think of myself as a role model for young blacks or young men in general-you can accomplish what you want to accomplish and it doesn't have to be drug related."

He also feels good about the future of N/NE Portland. "Since being in business myself and talking to other business owners on Alberta, I'm very optimistic. Their expanding and new business is coming in at an extremely fast pace."

Farris Fashions features avant-garde clothing and accessories for both men and women. The store is located at 2929 N.E. Alberta. The telephone number is 281-7164.

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