

Vintage clothing store connects owner to family, community

“I’ve basically been playing dress-up my whole life,” said Sara Stonecipher, owner of Misred Outfitters and president of the 600 Block in downtown St. Petersburg.

For Stonecipher, 28, owning a vintage clothing store is more than a business. It’s a way to connect with her family, impact her community and express her love for fashion. She opened the store on 615 Central Ave. in February 2010. But she dreamed of owning a vintage clothing store for years.

When Stonecipher was 7, her mother turned an old house on Beach Drive into a consignment shop called Designer’s Consigner. Her mother filled the house with clothes, but saved a small room under the stairs for her three daughters. She stocked it with blankets, toys, a TV and plenty of clothes. Stonecipher spent every Saturday at the store.

“From the time I could look over the counter, I was helping customers,” she said.

By the time she was 17, Stonecipher was working as a manager in the shop.

“You aspire to be like your mom,” she said, adding that she always knew she had a gift for fashion. “I just didn’t know where it was going to lead me.”

It led her to open Misred Outfitters – the first buy, sell, trade vintage clothing store in St. Petersburg. Customers can exchange their items for cash or store credit. Stonecipher trained six buyers across Florida to purchase additional merchandise. She also looks for vintage clothes and jewelry at auctions and estate sales.

Misred Outfitters only sells 1960s and 1970s vintage clothing.

“That’s what I like to wear,” Stonecipher said.

A yellow sundress dangles in the window display. Inside the shop, Stonecipher displays vintage jewelry on top of her childhood kitchen table where she used to eat her favorite Eggo waffles for breakfast. Cherry lace-up ankle boots perch on a shelf above silver Franco Sarto sandals.

“I only shop here,” said Jacquelyn Cosentino-Georges, a regular at the store. “My daughter knows this is the only place to get a gift card for me.”

Stonecipher and her three employees hang their favorite store items in a special section of Misred Outfitters. In Stonecipher's section, a long black gown keeps company with Moschino floral pants and a yellow jumper.

Stonecipher said she loves "being able to have first pick of everything."

"I have a pretty amazing closet," she said.

Today, Stonecipher's outfit is straight from her shop: a black romper with silver studs paired with Michael Kors heels. Her nails are painted coral, the same color her mother used to wear when Stonecipher was a child. She said she follows her mother's advice: "Never go out of the house without lipstick and nail polish."

"You're a walking advertisement," Stonecipher said. "Who's going to take you seriously if you can't even dress yourself?"

A silver cross necklace dangles from her neck. She always wears it.

"I could have never opened this store by myself," Stonecipher said, calling the store "a gift from God."

Starting a business wasn't easy. Money was tight. She said she and her husband, Nathan Stonecipher, ate a lot of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

He didn't always understand "why anybody would buy used clothing," Stonecipher said. "But he had faith in me."

Together, they began transforming an abandoned antique store, formerly a café, into a vintage clothing shop. Layers of old linoleum covered the floor. Discarded junk from the previous owners cluttered the rooms. Grease dripped down the walls. Stonecipher said it was "horrific." But she had a vision for the company – from the size of the dressing rooms to the air freshener.

Competition was fierce. Vintage clothing shops refused to give Stonecipher advice about starting her business.

"If I ever have my own store, I'm going to help everybody," Stonecipher determined.

Today, she is keeping that promise.

"Through her mentoring, [she's] helped me go into fashion merchandising," employee Marybeth Williams said. She plans to pursue a degree in fashion merchandising at Florida State University.

Stonecipher tries to give advice to new owners of fashion stores. She said she isn't threatened by potential rivals because every store is different.

As a third-generation resident of St. Petersburg, Stonecipher said she wants to impact the "fashion community in Tampa Bay." She stays busy as president of the 600 Block, which she describes as Central Avenue's art, music and fashion district.

Although Stonecipher said she loves fashion, her motivation for starting her company goes deeper. She wants to raise her children in the shop.

“The reason I opened [Misred Outfitters] was so that I could have a family, just like my mom opened her store and had a family,” Stonecipher said.