

One of Many, yet... One of a Kind

by Brenda Petrow

The sign in the front window of [Field's Fabrics](#) announces its once-a-year anniversary sale. This year, the parent company of our store, located at 5401 Portage Road in Kalamazoo, is celebrating its 57th year offering quality fabrics and notions to sewers in southwest Michigan.

The Kalamazoo store opened 20 years ago near the airport. Its location positions it perfectly to attract sewers from near and far. Connie Prior, who has worked at Field's for 15 years and now co-manages the store with Sandy Guba and Penny Dunham, says that it's not unusual to have customers come from Indiana to shop the many bolts on display. They're not shy, either, about asking why Field's doesn't expand into their state. Connie also remarks that it's not uncommon to see sewers in the shop once a year, stopping when they come from around the country to visit families. She especially enjoys hearing from year to year what they stitched from the fabrics that filled their suitcase the year before.

In the 15 years Connie has been at Field's, she's seen many changes – in the sewing industry and in the store's response to those changes. Quilters will find an expanded selection of cottons, contemporary urban collections as well as more traditional designs. The notions department has evolved to meet the demands of quilters and satisfy the needs of garment sewers.

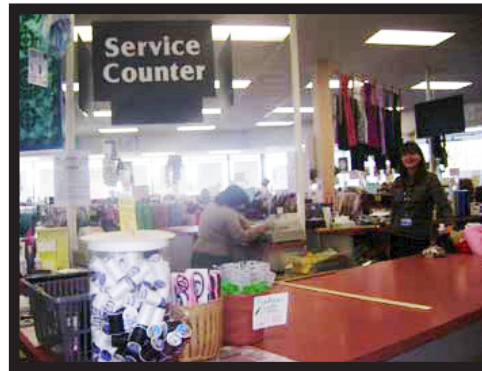
Garment sewers will find a large selection of knits and natural fibers. The staff encourages shoppers to consider the wide variety of couture fabrics that New York design houses stitched into high-end designer originals. These fabrics are perfect for our one-of-a-kind garments – there is usually only about 5 yards on a bolt! Ask the staff to help you find one that's a good buy for your project.

The bridal department, once occupying more floor space, has been downsized due to lack of customer demand. Fabrics for all special occasion dresses can still be found, laces and trims are on display in a glass case, and rhinestone embellished zippers will catch your eye.

The home dec department is large and, as Connie describes it, more “shoppable.” Sewers, it seems, know they can have custom window coverings and slip covers at a fraction of the cost by doing it themselves.

Connie attributes these changes to the staff's willingness to listen to customers' needs and wants and advocating for them with the parent company. She credits the changing product mix to the company's desire to tailor each store to its unique customer base.

It's impossible to mention the Kalamazoo Field's location without hearing about the exceptional customer service delivered by the staff. Connie is effusive about the experience they bring to the shopping experience. Approximately 75% of the staff has at least thirty years of sewing background, with interests that range from quilting, machine embroidery, garment construction (basic to couture), hand smocking, crazy-quilt design, costuming, home dec, and textile arts. Shoppers will find examples of these talents hanging throughout the store. These models often spur sewers to try new fabrics and new techniques. Response is especially noticeable in the sale



of special occasion and better dress fabrics.

One of the advantages Connie sees of being part of a [larger organization](#) is the ability to find fabrics for customers in sister stores. While staff does it daily, Connie says it's a huge service that sewers appreciate.

Field's, the parent company, recently expanded its [online shopping](#) at its newly redesigned website. Once used exclusively for the purchase of Ultrasuede, shoppers can now browse through a large selection of fabric, patterns, and notions.

Connie Prior and staff invite Kalamazoo ASG chapter members to stop...and shop. Field's, a long-time supporter of ASG events and activities, extends a 10% discount to ASG members. You'll find them a

[5401 Portage Road](#)

Kalamazoo, MI

269-383-4211

9:00 AM – 9:00 PM

Monday - Saturday