

Fabrics

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by hand by local women. The quilts are priced from \$295, which seems steep until Duncan points out that it takes at least four months to make one.

Drapery and upholstery supplies are in the converted principal's office, but we didn't linger there. It still feels ominous even though the principal has been gone for 39 years.

Duncan, now 35, began helping his parents run the business while he was still in high school.

After completing business classes at New River Community College, he took over the enterprise and now runs it with 12 employees. Many of the employees are related to Duncan, and all are served home-cooked meals prepared by Duncan's mother each day.

Lois Akres, who has worked at the store for more than six years, says working for the Duncans is "super." "I love to work with fabrics," she says.

Duncan says his business has been affected by development along the U.S. 460-Virginia 114 corridor in Christiansburg.

It was most noticeable he says, last Christmas when his local suppliers, with whom he had dealt for years, put his Christmas order on hold until the huge Wal-Mart order had been processed.

Duncan did not receive his shipment until January, and many of his faithful customers had to go elsewhere for their Christmas craft supplies. "That was the first time it really hit me that I was a small business," he said.

But the business is doing pretty good, he says, and he enjoys working in Floyd. His customers come from as far away as West Virginia, and Duncan likes the fact that his shop is easy to find in the small town. He also enjoys Floyd's lower tax rate, and, of course, the people.

Duncan is able to keep his prices low by buying large quantities of material from "cut and sew" factories in North Carolina, rather than dealing directly with the more expensive New York mills.

He buys top-quality overruns and old patterns and is able to retail them for up to 50 percent off their original wholesale price.

Duncan considers low prices, a wide selection and especially friendly service as the keys to the future of his business. "We have to maintain our niche," he said.



GENE DALTON/Staff

Jerry Duncan has a large selection of goods at School House Fabrics in Floyd