



The Undershirt celebrating its 30th year of keeping workers in stitches

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The Undershirt owner Shari Blackwell says there's a lot of variety to her work, since she deals with many types of businesses.

Rachael Rifkin
Staff Writer

For 30 years, The Undershirt, a custom career-apparel business, has striven to offer quality products, fair pricing and unparalleled personal service to their clients, according to its sole proprietor, Shari Blackwell. In celebration of their anniversary, they are hosting a mixer for local businesses and the Signal Hill Chamber, in conjunction with the Signal Tribune and Culinary Enterprises on Thursday, June 10 from 5:30pm to 7:30pm in their parking lot, 939 E. 27th St.

The Undershirt carries both apparel and promotional items. "We carry all types of sweatshirts, fleece, and T-shirts. Some of our items are made from organic material. But we're not just a T-shirt shop. We also do jackets, aprons, blankets, hats, duffel and carry bags, and golf balls," said Blackwell.

She bought the business in August of 2003 from Joan Heise and Lee Halter. Original owners Ken and Renee Beu had started The Undershirt in Belmont Shore and were located around 10th Street and Redondo Avenue, next to the Park Nursery. Three years later, they moved to Argonne Avenue and 2nd Street, where Luna now resides. Back then, they were also a retail store.

Soon afterwards, Heise and Halter bought the business and in 1991 sold off the retail part of The Undershirt to concentrate on custom screen printing and embroidery. They also brought The Undershirt to Signal Hill.

"We are a member of the Signal Hill Chamber of Commerce," said Blackwell. "I am a board member. We love being in Signal Hill."

Blackwell bought The Undershirt after 30 years in industrial sales and marketing. "I was getting really tired of the corporate world," she said. "I wanted to be more in control of how I serviced my customers. I wanted to do what I knew was right and not be dictated by corporate policy. My husband was also an entrepreneur, and I liked the lifestyle it afforded him. I liked the freedom and independence."

She had been looking at an invitation, paper goods and calligraphy business in Huntington Beach and a postal-service business in Long Beach, when her husband suggested his friend's business, which turned out to be Heise's. "He visited Joan one day, and she said she was thinking of retiring. She was in her 70s. He came home and asked me if it might be the type of business I'd be interested in. It felt like a good match, so I went for it," said Blackwell.

At The Undershirt, she gets to combine her sales and marketing background with her creative side.

"There's a lot of variety to my work. You're dealing with a lot of different types of businesses," said Blackwell. "I deal with people in the restaurant business, the plumbing and electrical business, landscaping business, corporate America. It's a real mix of people and projects. I do everything from sales to bookkeeping to order placing."

She especially likes helping her customers find just the right type apparel for their business. "I enjoy working one-on-one with my customers—everything from conception of their logo or design through selecting the appropriate product for them and then seeing it come to completion," she said. "Let's say a restaurant comes in. We discuss the concept of the restaurant, the style, and the design and then I suggest apparel, which could be polo shirts, dress shirts, shirts and ties. I not only recommend a product that will represent them well but also educate them on the different types of fabrics. What's going to hold up well for their type of application, and fit in their budget and their price point?"

To view The Undershirt's online catalogue, visit www.theundershirt.com. They can also be reached at undershirt@dslextre.com or (562) 426-8939.