

BUSINESS PROFILE

McDougal owns thriving women's boutique in downtown Winston-Salem

By JOHN HINTON
Chronicle Staff Writer

Victoria McDougal and her three partners had a difficult time getting a loan to open Petals, a women's boutique in downtown Winston-Salem.

"We went to every bank in Winston-Salem," said Mrs. McDougal, 30, co-owner and manager of the store. "None of the banks wanted to take a chance on a new business. We

"I had been working for other people for so long. In retail, you really have to like what you are doing, because you won't make any money unless you own the store."

— Victoria McDougal

had good credit, but minimum collateral."

Mrs. McDougal, her twin sisters, Jeanette and Jean Bias, and Foster Horne obtained personal bank loans to open the store.

Her sisters are flight attendants for Piedmont Airlines-Aviation Inc. "When they are not flying, they are working here," Mrs. McDougal said.

The partnership secured a loan from the city as part of its downtown revitalization,

McDougal said. The boutique was opened in Winston Square on Fourth Street in November 1985, she said.

"I didn't have the finances of my own," Mrs. McDougal said. "My family decided to back us, and we organized the business."

A native of Winston-Salem, Mrs. McDougal graduated from North Forsyth High School. She later took classes in fashion merchandising and interior design at the Art Institute in Atlanta.

The store has one full-time employee and one part-time worker, Mrs. McDougal said. "It is a lot of work," she said. "Everyone has to work in order for this store to make it."

Mrs. McDougal says that business is good. "The store is pretty much running itself," she said. "We have built up our clientele."

When the store first opened, Mrs. McDougal said she had to pay cash for merchandise when it arrived at the boutique. "We

now have established credit with our manufacturers," she said.

Most of the customers are businesswomen who work downtown, Mrs. McDougal said. "We have a good following," she said.

Mrs. McDougal was a retail manager for eight years for two other clothing stores in Winston-Salem and Atlanta.

"I had been working for other people for so long," she said. "In retail, you really have to like what you are doing, because you won't make any money unless you own the store."

The fact that she is black has not adversely affected her business, Mrs. McDougal said. "A lot of people don't care about who owns the store," she said. "We are here to do business."

Choosing a name for the store also became a dilemma, Mrs. McDougal said. "We had to register the name of the store," she said. "We tried to use everybody's name, but they were taken by other businesses."

"We came up with 'Petals' because we wanted a name that was catchy and airy," Mrs. McDougal said. There are flower arrangements throughout the store.



Victoria McDougal says she wanted to own a women's boutique after working as a manager at other clothing stores (photo by Art Blue).

In April the store moved from its location in the Mercantile Plaza across the street to 418 W. Fourth St., Mrs. McDougal said. The store is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The lunch and dinner hours are the busiest times in the store, Mrs. McDougal said.

"Our prices are not cheap, but they are reasonable," Mrs. McDougal said. "We do have some expensive pieces."

The store carries brand names such as Dana Hogan, MBR, I.B. Diffusion and Omanti. The

boutique sells suits, silk blouses, sweater jackets, leather pants, leather gloves and purses. The store has sizes 2 to 16.

"No woman should look bad," Mrs. McDougal said in an article in the *Winston-Salem Journal* last year. "I really believe with the right clothes and makeup, anyone can look nice -- not glamorous, but nice."

The store sells men's silk ties and snake belts, Mrs. McDougal said. "The businessmen really like them," she said.

The store offers a fingernail service and free gift wrapping

and alterations, Mrs. McDougal said.

Most of the store's clothes are bought in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas, McDougal said. "My sisters fly all over getting the merchandise," she said.

Mrs. McDougal also organizes fashion shows for local businesses and organizations. "We supply the models and the clothes," she said.

Popular styles this year include knits and bright colors, Mrs. McDougal said. "Shirts will be short and long," she said.

BUSINESS PEOPLE

Diggs becomes vice president, manager

By JOHN HINTON
Chronicle Staff Writer

Brenda B. Diggs rose through the ranks at Wachovia Bank and Trust Co. to become vice president and manager of its main office in Winston-Salem.

"I wanted to grow as the bank grew," Mrs. Diggs said. "This is a challenging and interesting job. No two days are alike."

Mrs. Diggs, 38, began working at the bank in 1968 as a teller, she said in an interview from her downtown office last week.

"I have believed in myself as an individual," Mrs. Diggs said. "You have to believe in yourself and clearly know your abilities and limitations."

A native of Winston-Salem, Mrs. Diggs graduated from Paisley High School. She earned a degree in secretarial science from Winston Business College.

Mrs. Diggs graduated *cum laude* from High Point College in May 1986.

In 1971, she became the customer service representative at the bank. After three years, Mrs. Diggs became a personal banker at the branch at the Thruway Shopping Center.

"I have never sacrificed my family life to achieve my personal goals," said Mrs. Diggs, who is married to James H. Diggs, a manager of the credit union offices at the Whitaker Park branch of RJR Nabisco Inc.

"I never could have done it without him," Mrs. Diggs said about her husband. "My husband has never had any problems with my success."

The Diggses have two children, James Diggs Jr., 20, and Jennifer Diggs, 15.

After five years as a personal banker, Mrs. Diggs became manager of the bank's Hanes Mall and Reynolda offices in 1979. Two years later, she was a retail marketing officer.

In her present job, Mrs. Diggs supervises a staff of 30 people, including personal bankers, secretaries and tellers. She is responsible for loans and deposits at the bank.

Being a black woman has never been an obstacle to Mrs. Diggs, she said. "I am an unusual woman," Mrs. Diggs said. "My credibility was established long



Brenda Diggs has worked for 18 years at Wachovia Bank and Trust Co. (photo by James Parker).

before I got to this job."

Mrs. Diggs says that she has a professional relationship with the male executives at the bank. "There is respect among us that runs both ways," she said. "They look at me as an individual first, not as a female."

Most customers want services such as savings accounts, checking accounts and credit cards, Mrs. Diggs said. "Most customers want personal service from us, and we try to give them that."

Many small businesses, such as retail stores, specialty shops and restaurants, are also customers of

the bank, Mrs. Diggs said.

The bank's customers represent a striving economy in Forsyth County, Mrs. Diggs says. "We always like it when the economy is good," she said.

The banking industry offers many opportunities for blacks and other minorities, Mrs. Diggs says. "It is regarded as a service industry that will offer challenging jobs throughout the early 1990s," she said.

Mrs. Diggs is a member of the board of directors of the Salvation Army Girls' Club and the United Way of Forsyth County.

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