



Photo by Jim Heffner

THE GRANDFATHER OF DOUBLE KNITS — That's the title conferred on Robert Friedl many years ago because of his double-knit expertise. Friedl, the Austrian consul in North and South Carolina is a textile expert and a local historian. He is the president of Robela Knit Shop, Inc. housed in a historical building on Alsace St.

Robela Knits in Mount Holly is owned by an Austrian consul

BY JIM HEFFNER
Staff Reporter

Many would be surprised to know that one of the highest ranking officials of the Austrian government lives in Mount Holly. Some would be surprised to learn, also, that the official Austrian consulate for North and South Carolina is located in Mount Holly.

The consul is Robert Friedl and the consulate is located in his Robela Knit Shop, the old Mount Holly Cotton Mill on Alsace St.

Friedl is a remarkable man, one who has spent his entire life in the textile industry. A man who has soaked up every scrap of information available on the operation and maintenance of knitting equipment. He is a veritable encyclopedia of textile industry knowledge.

"I've been in the textiles business all my life," Friedl said.

Born and reared in Vienna, Friedl attended the HTL School, a university in Vienna noted for its textiles curriculum.

During World War II HTL was bombed and reduced to rubble. After the war, Friedl

went back to see what he could do.

"I dug the machinery out of the rubble and set them up again," he said. "The school was able to reopen."

The Nazis occupied Vienna during the war and Friedl's family suffered through many years of despair. His grandmother was the only family member that was harmed.

"She was run over and killed by a Russian tank," he said. "We don't know if it was an accident."

Friedl moved to New York to work for Bernhard Altman at Altman's House of Cashmere. Altman owned a large herd of cashmere goats and a fleet of ships. He was the first man to spin cashmere in Europe.

From those beginnings, Friedl built an impeccable reputation. Textile manufacturers from several continents, including Europe, South and Central America and the United States clamored for his expertise.

Friedl set up plants and trained workers for manufacturers such as Burlington Industries, Millikin, M. Lowenstein, Hanes, Wamsutta,

Massachusetts Mohair and Neisler Mills in Kings mountain.

He rubbed shoulders and became friends with some of the most influential textile magnates in the world, including Roger Millikin of Deering-Millikin in South Carolina and Frank Hanes of Hanes Hosiery in Winston-Salem.

"I installed the first double-knit machines for Roger Millikin in Spartanburg in 1961," Friedl said, "and I set up Hanes' first plant in Winston Salem."

Friedl became so knowledgeable of the double-knit technology that many people in the industry still refer to him as the "Grandfather of Double Knits."

"I installed the first double-knit machine in the United States," he said. "That was in Massachusetts."

He also personally made the first swimsuit worn by Esther Williams in the movies.

Friedl came to the Mount Holly area in 1959, but continued to travel, setting up plants

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