

# The Golden Years

1947-1997

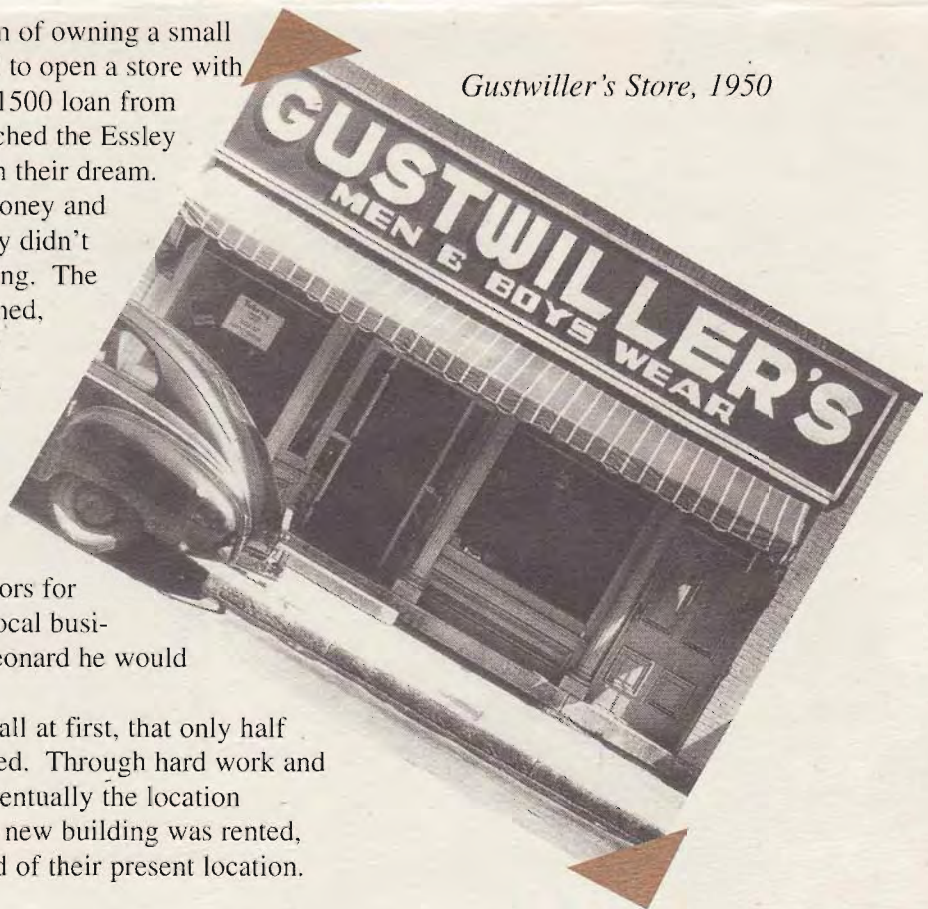


*Mary & Leonard Gustwiller, 1943*

Fifty years ago Mary and Leonard Gustwiller started a men's clothing store in Ottawa at the present location of Town & Country Flower Shop. During the Depression of 1931-33 Leonard's parents lost their farm in New Bavaria. The Gustwillers moved to Defiance where Leonard worked at a local factory, then he went to work at BR Bakers Clothing Store in Toledo. It was a very prestigious store in its time. After a year, Leonard moved back to Defiance where he resumed working at the factory. He also sold suits from a suitcase of swatches as a sideline, sometimes selling the suit off his back. He was drafted in 1941 joining World War II forces. Leonard and Mary Hartman were married in 1943.

Leonard had a dream of owning a small haberdashery. They decided to open a store with \$1500 they had saved and \$1500 loan from Mary's father. They approached the Essley shirt company salesman with their dream. He told them to take their money and move to Florida because they didn't have any chance of succeeding. The next morning, more determined, they went back to the Essley salesman and persuaded him to sell them white shirts. They then went to a Toledo wholesaler and purchased underwear, ties, socks and other miscellaneous items. Gustwiller's opened their doors for business in March 1947. A local businessman, at the time, told Leonard he would never make it a year.

The store was so small at first, that only half of the flower shop was needed. Through hard work and diligence, sales grew, and eventually the location became too small. In 1950, a new building was rented, which is now the far east end of their present location.



*Gustwiller's Store, 1950*

*"Leonard showing Tom the ropes", 1973*



*"Leonard's territory", 1948*



*Leonard, Mary and Tom, 1973*  
*"Now that's a fashion statement."*



In 1971, Tom left the teaching profession and took over as manager of the store so his father, Leonard, could semi-retire. Several years later, Tom bought the former Hawkeys building, which was adjacent to their present location. Gustwiller's began to sell ladies clothing in 1979. Through the years, they expanded upstairs and now carry a full line of women's apparel. Tom's daughter, Teresa, became the Third Generation of Gustwillers to come into the business. She is a 1993 BGSU graduate with a Business Degree.

With \$3000 and a dream, Mary and Leonard started what is now one of the finest Men's and Ladies clothing store in the state. Many styles have come and gone and many wonderful people have worked at the store. More importantly there have been many great customers who have passed through the doors in the last fifty years.

*Thank You*



*Tom, 1948*  
*"Youngest Salesman on the floor"*