

In The Genes

Rippe's
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Rippe's
over 100 years of fashion

Over 100 years ago, young man named Ben Rippe fell in love with the daughter of a North Carolina retail merchant and the young couple opened a clothing store in Danville, Virginia. They were quite successful selling the Gibson girl look to local ladies seeking high shirtwaists, long skirts with frilly petticoats, corselets, high-top lace-up shoes, parasols and the all-important hat, which Rippe's sold for up to \$200. Business was good.

Fast forward to 2010, there is a man named Ben Rippe with a clothing store in Danville, Virginia selling wonderful fashionable, quality clothing, accessories, shoes, and furs to ladies from all over the surrounding areas. Business is still very very good!

The first Ben Rippe ran the store until his early death in 1936 and his widow Annie took over the business until her son, Murray returned from World War II. Murray, also known as "Buddy," expanded the business and constructed the most modern building in downtown Danville. In 1961 he purchased the store from his mother and expanded in 1965, buying the building next door, until the store exceeded 10,000 square feet.

He established a wonderful fur department, providing a cold storage fur vault, fur cleaning, recycling and repairing. Today Rippe's offers private label furs and keep over a hundred pieces in stock. They have consignment agreements with other stores, and are a major player in the fur business.

Murray had two children – one son who today is a talented musician and professor in Memphis, Tennessee, and another son, Ben, the current proprietor of Rippe's, who purchased the family business in 1992.

Ben who is a dear friend, is always someone I rely on for business advice and sharing. He explained to me all the rules concerning an "arms length" transaction and the proper legal and correct way to purchase a family business to be certain it is not a "gift," but a fair agreement for all involved. (If this is something you need to know about – Ben is the man to ask.)

Ben grew up in his family's business, but wasn't really sure it was his life plan so he went away to college. When his Dad asked him to come home and give it a try, there was no question. He returned to Danville in 1979 and has been there ever since. (He still got that business degree from Duke.)

There is another generation, young Sam in his teens now. No real answer as to whether he will carry on the great family tradition.

The store now is over 15,000 square feet, including the separate shoe store and the fur room. Ben believes in working with consultants and he is with RMSA for financial and OTB, and Carol Koffman for buying in New York. He and the other two store buyers go to New York on a regular basis; he likes the Atlanta Shoe Show, and attends markets everywhere, even as far as Hong Kong.

Upper moderate, better to bridge would be the category of their merchandise. Brands include MUSE, DONNA MORGAN, J. SONG, TRINA TURK, SEVEN FOR ALL MANKIND, KASPER, TAHARI, CALVIN KLIEN, NYDJ. Shoes are as varied as ONEX, YELLOWBOX, VANILI, THINK, and CLARK. Ben says the dress business is good, and sportswear is where the action is. I loved his comment, "I buy everything I can find in plus sizes!"

Through LBA I have known Ben for years and always admired him for his business savvy, but more so for his generosity and good soul. This is a man who endows scholarships, who gives back to his community, and who supports any and all causes for the good of mankind.

I called his store one day and was told, "He's down in your home state this week." I found later he was taking time off from his business to be in New Orleans helping building homes with Habitat for Humanity.

This is the kind of merchant I am so proud to have as a friend and a colleague.



The Rippe Men

