

Snapshots of People at Work

re: Dalene Lanum, ready to wear

In spring, her thoughts turn to vests, shoes and bow ties — it's tuxedo season.

Job: Customer service and information systems director, Sam Meyers Formal Wear Inc., 3400 Bashford Manor Court, Albany, Ind. **Family:** Husband, Kent. **The times . . . :** Since she started in 1986 with Sam Meyers, the formal wear business has changed just like any other business. For Sam Meyers, the biggest changes have been in technology.

"When I came here they had just purchased a computer. They had literally only had it a couple of weeks." Before, the process of customizing a tuxedo from a customer's choices had been done manually with a slew of log books. . . . **they are a-changin'!** "We can track anything in any manner you can think of." Fully computerized, orders are entered and can be monitored as each part of the tuxedo, from coat to shoes, is assembled in the stock department. If an incorrect item is accidentally scanned, the mistake will appear on a screen. **Her job:** She's responsible for keeping the computer system running as well as overseeing the customer service department. On a given day she might call a store clerk about a customer's fashionably dangerous selection: "Do you realize what this is going to look like together?" **Check your pockets:** There have been wallets left in tuxedos — and other bizarre mementos. "Last week we had a boat registration and a car registration. Now why people would have those in their pockets I don't know." When possible, the items are returned to their owners. **The cruelest months:** "April and May are your big prom seasons." But with more weddings scheduled in the spring and in the fall, this time of year is especially hectic. **Return to sender:** Once the prom is over, tuxedos can linger like leisure suits in closets and the trunks of cars. Letters are sent and phone calls made. "We are booking against what we own. We need them back." **Fashion sense:** "At the time I came, they were just getting rid of the light blue tuxedo." She has since seen an evolution that has spanned nearly two decades, a Miami Vice phase and the emergence of neckties into the tuxedo wardrobe.

The death of the cummerbund: A visitor looking into the Sam Meyers stock department 10 years ago would have seen "aisles and aisles of cummerbunds in all colors." Today the vest has effectively replaced the cummerbund. **The last word:** It's a deadline business. "Somewhere there's a girl (getting married), and we want her wedding to look right."



By the numbers

Shipping news: Sam Meyers sends rented formal wear to stores and wholesalers across the country. "Just about all 50 states are covered."

What's in a tux?: In the company's warehouse there are 97 coat styles, 28,000 pairs of pants, 197 vest styles and coat sizes ranging from 3 to 70.

Dance dates: Prom planning usually begins after Easter. If Easter is early, there's a six-week window. If it's late, four weeks. "It's nice when they're spread out."

Got ideas?

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