Back to school with MONDAWMIN MALL

Are designer jeans on their way out?

Area merchants report sales down, popularity waning

While designer jeans may have some kids drooling (and parents wincing!), area merchants here feel they have just about seen their day and say that cordoroy is about the wisest buy when selecting a back-to-school wardrobe.

Not only has the cost of cordoroy remained just about where it was last year, but items made from the fabric save pennies in the long run by having greater durability, longer seasonal wearing time, and being machine-washable, which cuts down on costly cleaning bills.

Carl Stokes, manager of Every Man's Son clothing store in the Mondawmin Mall, said designer jeans are giving way to cordoroy pants—some designer made, some not.

And Richard Krieger, who manages both the Lexington Lady and the Three and Five Shop in the Lexington Mall, told us that by maintaining a relatively uniform price level this year as last, cordoroy is actually cheaper than other fabrics.

Most merchants feel that the big demand for designer jeans is actually on the downtrend. By the beginning of the year, they say, words like Jordache and Gloria Vanderbilt may be things of the past.

With that in mind, they say, parents can feel pretty safe about buying a good pair of Lees or other names brand jeans to push their offspring into the new school year.

"A good pair of Lees will look as good as a designer pair," said Stokes. "As you knock off the name on a pair of jeans, you should expect to pay about $10 less for your merchandise."

"What you pay for (with designer brands) is the name, style, and pocket treatment. Sut the demand for the designer cuts are dwindling."

Stokes said that in his store, parents and young people alike are turning to cordoroy items, including designer cordoroy pants. But even those, he says, are cheaper than the current designer jeans, which run anywhere from $29 to $70 a pair.

But jeans and pants are not the only items parents have to be concerned with. Stokes says best buys in other areas include sweaters and velours. Crew necks and pull-overs are good buys as are some cotton flannels. Dress pants, he says, are not particularly popular this year, and dress coats, for the most part, are out as well.

"Pea coats are very popular," he says. "They're practical, reasonable, and wear well."

Stokes said the popular, waist length coats do very well in handling brisk Maryland winters, and, he said, those lined with down, or goose-feathers, do even better.

In addition to the pea coats, Stokes said that the vinyl down coats, those with the zip-off sleeves, are another hot item, and an extremely good buy.

"They're warm," he replied to a skeptical query. "They're sent here from the midwest and the northern states, where the winters are really bad." Stokes said that even though the jackets are waist-length, or possibly three-quarters, they pose no particular problems for young people with places to go and people to see.

"Hot" Items for Girls

The manager of the Lexington Lady said that "split skirts," a comeback from earlier times, are quite popular this year with the girls, as well as jumpsuits, regular as opposed to designer jeans, and a special-type jacket called "members only."

"That's a motorcycle-type jacket that used to be worn by men, actually," said Richard Krieger. "It's a very hip look. They're usually about 80 percent wool, but they're made in leather and other fabrics as well. It's short, a very short jacket, that young girls find very appealing."

Krieger said that this year, more than ever, parents are price conscious, and he, like Stokes, advised cordoroy as the best buy of the school year.

"You don't get as much for your money," he said, "so it pays to be smart. Cordoroy saves you cleaning expenses, can wear longer, and wears well."

Jumpers, in all fabrics, are top buys this year, and sportswear is as popular as it ever was.

"We don't sell many dresses," he said. "Skirts, pants and slacks are the hottest items."

In female coats, the quilted style is back again this year and Krieger says it is an excellent buy.

"The quiltec styles are usually not too dressy," he said. "But they're a good buy."

Usually ranging in price from $49 to $69, quilted coats come in a variety of styles and colors, can be down-lined for extra warmth, are water repellent and warm, Krieger says.

Wool coats, on the other hand, are a less prudent buy, requiring more care and being more expensive from the outset. A quilted coat can serve just about any purpose a young lady might have, says Krieger.

Other items to watch for are wool and corderoy blazers, which are selling at about $30 this year, and which can boost any wardrobe by providing instant variety by encouraging different combinations.

Carl Stokes advises shoppers to be wary of so-called "better buying seasons.

"Prices are in the peak range now, and they'll be that way until the end of the year," he said. He said prices have not really risen from last year's levels, but they haven't dropped, either. Nor are they expected to.

"Maybe after the holidays prices will fall, but not until then." Stokes said. He also said that contrary to popular belief, prices are not raised just prior to the holidays, but are sometimes lowered in order to boost sales and make way for the spring inventory.

In all, parents are advised to shop wisely, keeping in mind that dollars and cents are not apt to go as far this year as they did last year or the year before.

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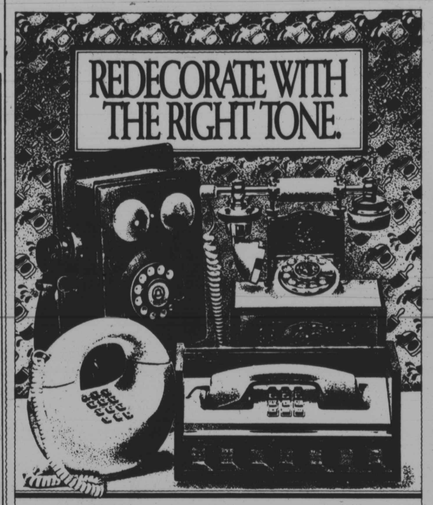

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School shoes as an offering

Church meets needs of poor

It began about three years ago in the middle of a Sunday morning worship service.

The Rev. John R. Bryant, pastor of Bethel AME Church, approached the pulpit and begged the congregation to be patient with him, but that he had to share something that the Lord had laid on his heart.

"We're going to have a service on Labor Day," he said. "At 6 a.m. in the morning. And I want you to bring an offering..."

That offering, it turned out, was to be one of three things: a job, a can of food, or a pair of new school shoes for a needy child.

On Labor Day, when so many of us have jobs we can and should be thankful for, we have to remember those who don't have jobs, money to buy shoes for their children, food to eat," he said.

And so the people came. In the quiet morning light that first year, people filed out of pews into the aisles and up to the altar to deposit their gifts. Shoes, new shoes, were piled up, requiring large boxes to cart them off across the street where needy children already waited in line.

The Bethel AME Church Labor Day Sunrise Service has since become a tradition. And so have the shoes.

"Look what I have here," said a woman with a bag from Two Guys department store. Three pairs of brand new shoes lay in the bag, and the woman could not conceal her feelings.

"No, I don't go to Bethel, at least not all the time. But I just think it's such a good idea. I had kids growing up at one time, and I remember that it wasn't easy, getting them ready for school."

A relative of hers, listening, agreed. She, too, had already purchased three pairs of new shoes, which she proudly showed off. (You can really get a lot of shoes if you shop right, she advised.) She had her own thoughts on the subject.

"It's my way of giving," she said quietly. A lot of folks like to be up front, doing big things in the church, getting a lot of notice.

"I don't like that so much, but I feel like I have to give something. That's how I do it."

The woman explained that not only does she purchase shoes herself for the service, but she solicits money for shoes from others as well.

"You'd be surprised at how many people like to give to this," she said. "All you have to do is ask for a dollar here, a dollar there. People give, they really do."

As she talked, her brother walked past and said he would have a contribution ready for her later in the week. No, he was not a member of Bethel.

"I don't mind," he said, "it's a good idea to me."

Officers of the church are busy now organizing for this year's Sunrise Service, which will take place Monday, Sept. 7, at 6 a.m. Neighborhood residents are alerted; ushers are being given mini-courses on how to fit young children for shoes; chairs are being set aside for the youngsters to sit in when it's their turn.

Bethel members say it's just a way to be obedient to God. It's a way of living the Scripture that says the converted must help he who is not converted; that the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak. It's no big thing. It's part of being Christian...new shoes, jobs, and all.

—Sojourner-Douglass

(Continued from Page 23)

munity as a whole if they took their skills back to the community and used them in a practical way.

The Carter theory has apparently worked.

"A large percentage of our graduates (Simmons estimates 40 percent) go on to graduate school. They go back to their jobs and are advanced, they get raises. And they come back here and make a contribution to us in time," Simmons said.

The enthusiasm of the students has rubbed off onto professionals, who have swallowed the zeal and begun to donate their resources in terms of time and expertise. Most of them volunteer.

"We get most of the money for books from tuition," Simmons explained. But the total expertise we command here...it would cost close to $200,000 if it were computed, I'm sure."

Simmons said that the atmosphere at the college adds to the community flavor that has to be. "Mothers bring daughters, daughters bring fathers . . . it's something to see," he said.

Simmons acknowledges that Sojourner-Douglass may not become a multi-million dollar university, but it will always live up to the purposes for which it was intended.

Since its separation from Antioch, it has had to begin to come up with ways to raise money, in addition to the tuition payments, but assistance has been good so far. C and P has donated funds, and other city businesses have expressed interest.

The administrators have recently secured a grant from the federal government as well. More is on the way, Simmons feels.

Approximately 350 students have enrolled for classes this year, a substantial increase from last year. And Simmons expects the figures to keep rising.

"This is," he said quietly, "just like the literature says... a college whose time has come."

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