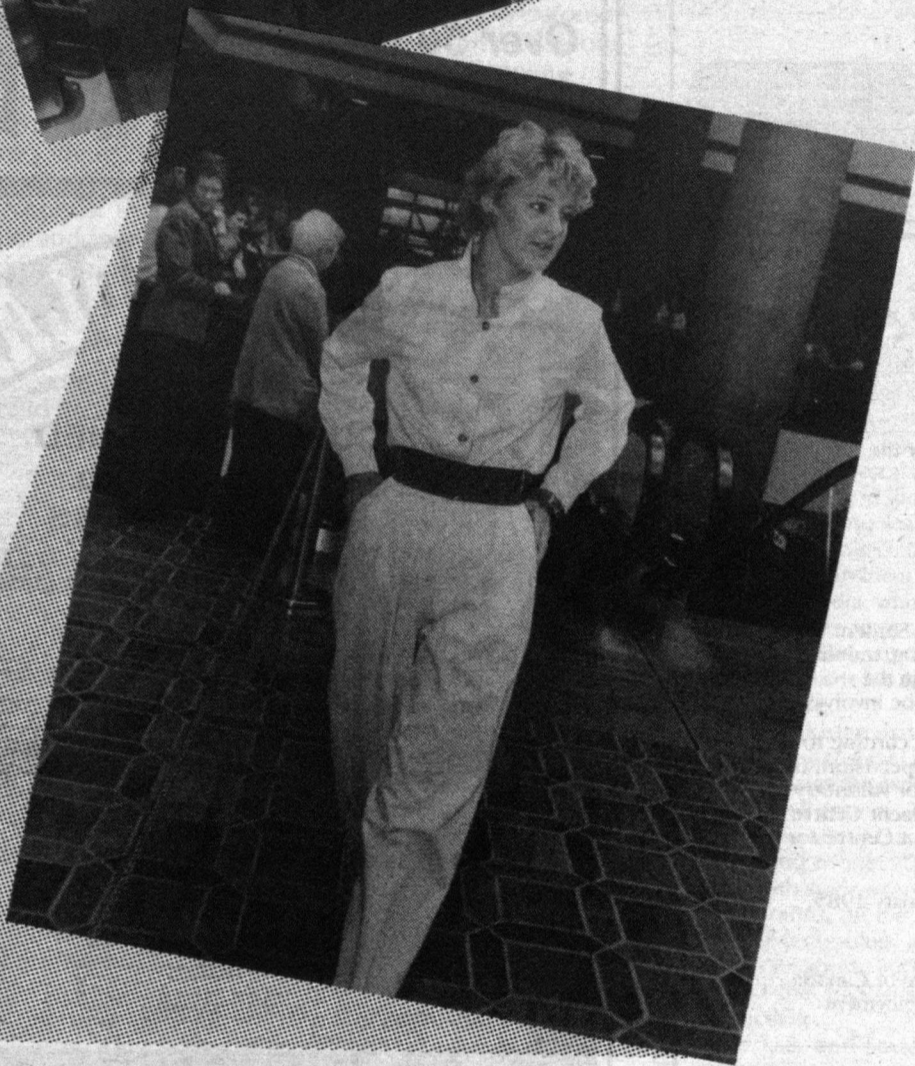
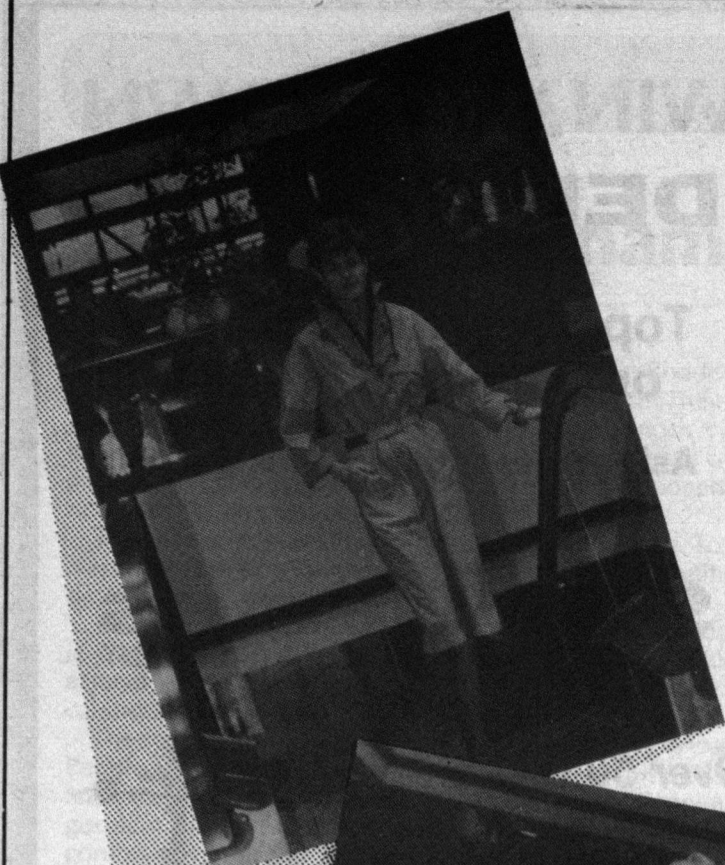


From bags



When Mellanie Stephens opened the original Kettle Creek Canvas Co. store during Canada's worst recession in thirty years, she had no ambition to sell clothes and no idea her tiny business would grow into a 38-franchise empire grossing over \$5 million a year.

In Edmonton to promote a showing of Kettle Creek's first full fall line, Stephens retraced her financial Cinderella story and explained the appeal of her clothes.

"I've been really lucky," Stephens says. "The company is surrounded by good people."

Many of the "good people" Stephens attracts come from her home town of Port Stanley, Ontario, a tiny (pop. 1900) fishing village.

One of her friends helped her secure a \$15,000 bank loan to start the company.

"I really liked Port Stanley and I was just trying to think of a way to stay and make a living," she says. "I planned to make made-to-measure duffel bags for the sailors that come into the port. We were going to expand by getting into the mail order market."

But the renovated herring factory she sold her goods at looked too sparse, "I flipped in

clothes because they were a lot easier to make. But now the bags have fallen behind the clothes."

She says the drawstring pants and matching tops she made at the last moment sold out before the bags did on opening day.

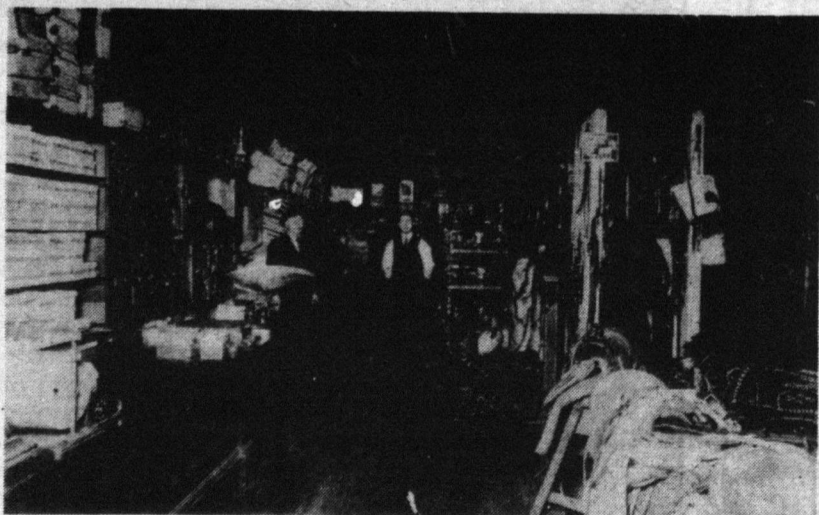
To keep up with the demand, Stephens hired some women to make more clothes and she was on her way to building a cross-country franchise empire.

"We will have opened our 38th store on Thursday, with about eight more on stream by next May," she says. "That'd just about cover the country, as far as (franchise) territory is concerned."

Stephens will be in Whitehorse this week to look at the possibility of opening a store there.

Stephens adds that she is encouraged by the success of Kettle Creek "boutiques" set up in some haute couture shops in the U.S., but thinks the price tags there are too high. "We don't want to sell that way," she says. "We'd really like to go in aggressively. The store will most likely be company-owned."

One reason the price of Kettle Creek goods are inflated when they get to the U.S. is the duty on women's clothes, which is higher than on men's. To get around that,



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Mel Stephens, founder of Kettle Creek Canvas Co.: low-tech, high quality cottons.