

Something *Old*, Something *New*



MarWin
Bridal
*maintains
its family
traditions.*

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

When Margaret and Edward Winwood opened MarWin Bridal on Valentine's Day in 1980, brides were saying "yes" to wedding gowns with long, poofy sleeves, big ruffles and cathedral-length trains. Four decades later, the styles may have changed, but MarWin's commitment to personalized service remains the same.

The original MarWin Bridal was a fixture on Route 30 in Irwin for nearly 30 years. The Winwoods sold the store to another family in 2007, but it closed in 2008. A decade later, MarWin would be resurrected by Jamie McKee, the Winwoods' granddaughter, in a new location in downtown Irwin.

"From growing up around MarWin, I have always loved everything wedding related, especially wedding dresses. It was always my dream to have my own bridal store," says McKee. "After college, I got a job working at a corporation in downtown Pittsburgh and really missed everything a small business has to offer. After many talks with Grandma and other friends and family, I decided to start taking the steps to reopen MarWin."

The store has been a true family affair from its origin. McKee's mother, father, and brother all worked at the store in different roles over the years. And of course, there's the store's name, which is derived from Margaret Winwood's first and last names.

"When opening, they didn't want something like 'Margaret's Bridal,' since it was very common to have a first name followed by bridal at that time," she explains. "My pap was trying to think of something unique, and MarWin stuck."

Unfortunately, when the business was sold in 2007, the original building on Route 30 was sold separately, so McKee had to find a new storefront—but knew she wanted to stay local. A 2002 Norwin graduate, McKee grew up on Larimer Avenue in North Huntingdon, right next door to her grandparents. In fact, she and her husband bought a house on that same street after they were married.

"While I was thinking of reopening, I wouldn't even consider anything outside of Irwin/North Huntingdon because I love this area," she says. "I knew I didn't want to be in a shopping plaza but something with a more intimate, homey feeling on the inside and outside. When my current location became available, it was perfect, and I knew it was the right time to reopen MarWin."

The new MarWin Bridal opened on Oak Street in Irwin in 2017. Like her grandparents, McKee has remained committed to ensuring that brides have a cozy, relaxed and personal experience while shopping for a wedding gown. The store features two separate suite-style dressing rooms to give brides-to-be and their



guests complete privacy. The store provides water and coffee, and customers are permitted to bring in their own drinks or snacks at no extra charge. To ensure a relaxed experience, customers with appointments are given priority and take precedence over walk-ins.

Brides are assisted by one of MarWin's three experienced bridal consultants, Jennifer, Bianca and Gina. Since MarWin consultants do not earn commission, their focus can be on the customer's experience and not on "high-pressure sales," says McKee.

"This is not your typical sales experience," she continues. "We want our brides to know that we're open and honest. If we don't have the dress you're looking for, we can help you find it. Shopping for a wedding gown should be about the bride, not about the sale."

Should a bride say "yes to the dress" at MarWin, the store has two in-house seamstresses who each have decades of experience. One of those is McKee's mother, Karen, who is Margaret's daughter-in-law and was also a seamstress at the original MarWin.

The store's best-selling brand is Essence of Australia, one of today's top wedding dress designers, notes McKee. The brand, which is locally exclusive to MarWin, is known for dresses with plunging necklines, sheer fabrics, and side cutouts—details that many modern brides are seeking.

"Shopping for your dream wedding dress should be fun," says McKee. "It's helpful to do some research on wedding dresses, in terms of designers or styles, before going into a store but go in with an open mind and don't overthink it. Whether it's the first or 20th dress you put on, you will get a connection with a dress and feel like a bride."

MarWin Bridal is open by appointment only Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Wednesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit marwinbridal.com. ■

Jamie McKee with her grandmother Margaret Winwood, the original owner of Marwin, at the store's reopening ceremony in 2017.

