



Photo by Kevin Blayney

Over the past 100 years, the Gershon family has developed a sterling reputation inside the dry cleaning industry. Gathering next to its retail counter at 3838 Troost in Kansas City, Mo., are Bruce Gershon, owner of Arrow Fabricare Services and grandson of its founder; Bruce's wife Stephanie, who is in charge of the company's human resources department; Susie Shatz, granddaughter of the founder who works in customer service; Jackie Gershon and Robert (Bob) Gershon. Bob Gershon, the founder's son, joined the company in 1947 and still comes to the office every day.

Family Business Thrives

Quality service and diversification help Arrow Fabricare shine in its 100th year

By Barbara Bayer

Bruce Gershon just celebrated his 40th anniversary with the family business he now owns and runs, Arrow Fabricare Services. His 40th work anniversary coincides with the company's 100th anniversary, something the Gershon family is extremely proud of.

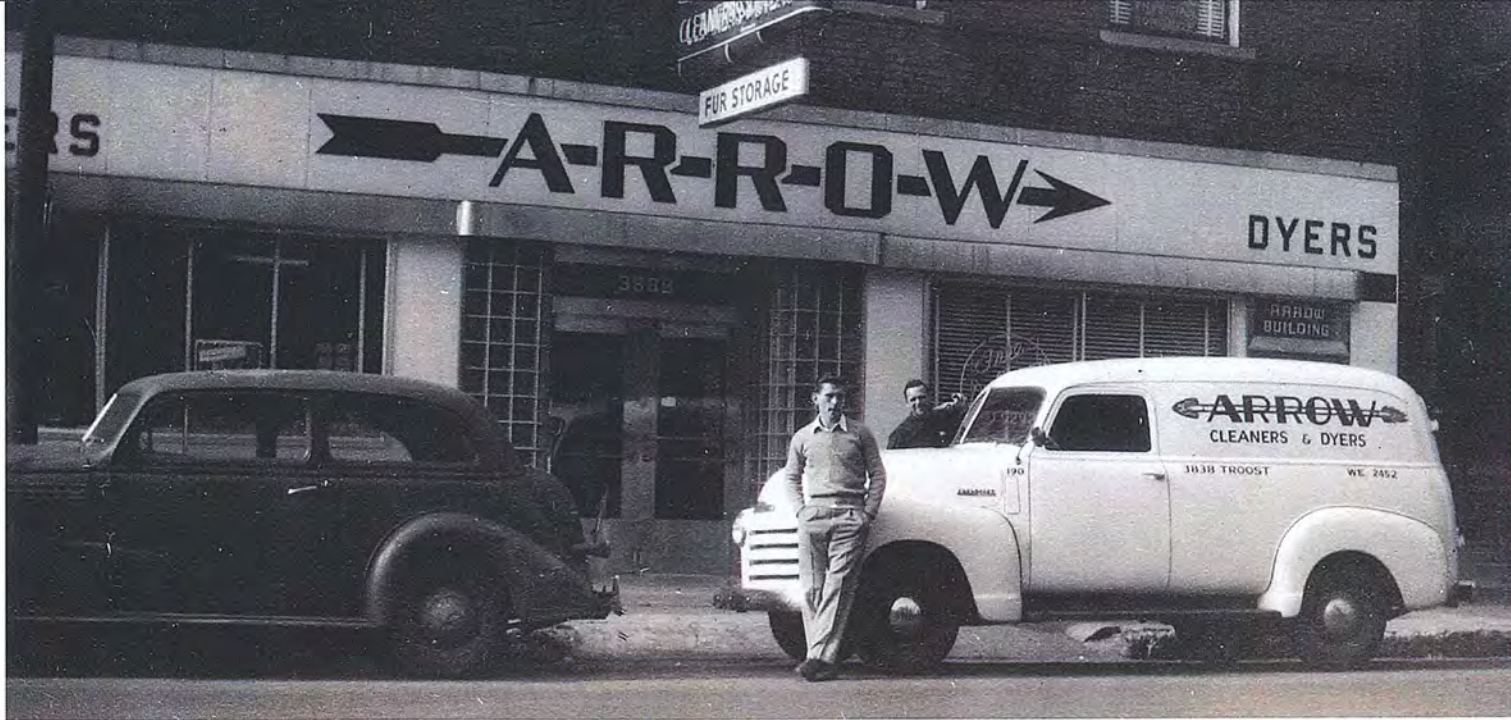
"Dad (Robert Gershon) and Grandpa (Joseph Gershon) always stressed doing a good job and doing it the right way. Quality was so important. That's one of the main reasons we're still in business today," said Bruce Gershon, the third generation of his family to own and operate the business.

Joseph Gershon came to America from Poland through Ellis Island. As a young man he fostered a strong reputation in Kansas

City, Mo., for his exceptional skills with needle and thread. He opened Arrow's doors in 1914 just a few blocks down on Troost from where the company is currently located. He planned to call his business "Gershon Tailors" but his cousin, a haberdasher, suggested "Arrow" like the popular shirts that he sold during that time.



Joseph Gershon opened Arrow Cleaners and Tailors in 1914 at 4301 Troost. His son Melvin stands behind the original retail counter at 3838 Troost Ave., in the building where it still serves its customers today.



Arrow offered pick-up and delivery service from day one, which is still one of the hallmarks of the business today. This photo was taken around 1947 in front of the then new location at 3838 Troost Ave., where 67 years later they are still located.

Joseph's son Melvin worked alongside his father. Then Bob Gershon returned from World War II in 1947, where he had been serving in the Air Force as a flight engineer on B-29s, and began working immediately at the family business. Now that both of his sons were working there, Joseph decided to add to Arrow's capabilities and brought dry cleaning in-house.

Melvin eventually left the company, but Bob dove right in, ultimately purchasing it from his father and running it until he sold it to his son, Bruce, in 1988. However, Bob did not retire in the literal sense; he simply cut back. At age 88 he still spends a few hours every morning working in the office, handling customer services for some furriers and cleaners. Other family members work at Arrow as well including Susie Shatz, Bruce's sister who works in customer service, and Stephanie Gershon, Bruce's wife who runs Arrow's human resources department.

When Bruce Gershon started working at Arrow full time in 1974, he said the company already had a great name.

"There was a tradition. When I went out to do sales, I had a company with a 60-year history to go sell that had a strong reputation for quality," he said.

In 1974, Arrow employed six people. Now it employs 80. The business is a mixture of wholesale — business Arrow does for other dry cleaners and furriers — and retail.

"We call ourselves a specialty dry cleaner," he explained.

Originally Arrow's core business was dry cleaning, laundry and tailoring. And under Bob Gershon's leadership, Arrow made hats and was a pioneer in leather cleaning. Now it's difficult to find a dry cleaning service in which Arrow does not specialize. The company provides fine dry cleaning, shirt laundry, alterations and reweaving, leather and fur cleaning, storage and repair, bridal gown preservation, French laundry of luxury bed and table linens, drapery and blind cleaning, fire and water damage restoration dry cleaning, nationwide mail order cleaning, and other unique and interesting services.

Arrow's resources are divided into two buildings— the main building at 3838 Troost and the newest facility in Kansas City, Kan., which houses the French laundry, drapery and fire restoration services.

Note that Arrow has only one retail outlet, in its main building on Troost. That's by design.

Continued on page 18



Photo by Kevin Blayney

Arrow Fabricare Services has been located in the same neighborhood at 38th and Troost Avenue for all of its 100 years.



Photo by Kevin Blayney

Bridal gown cleaning and preservation is one of the many specialty areas of Arrow Fabricare Services. Bruce Gershon checks out a wedding dress ready to be processed in the plant.

“Our locations are our pick-up and delivery vehicles. We bring in most of our dry cleaning business through our retail routes that service people at their homes and offices and even department stores. The home delivery routes is something that we’ve done from the very beginning. Now it’s become the new latest, greatest thing in the industry and we’ve been doing it for 100 years.”

Over the years Arrow has positioned itself as a high-end retail dry cleaner.

“That way the cleaners that are our customers wouldn’t look at us as a competitor, competing with them on price and locations.”

The business has grown considerably since Bruce Gershon purchased it from his father.

“The growth in the business has a lot to do with adding the other services. One of the first things I wanted to do was get into fur cleaning,” Bruce said. “I wanted to be more competitive with our direct wholesale competitor.”

“Later, we bought out our only local leather cleaning competitor — Ram Leather Care — in 1985.”

Another area in which Arrow expanded under Bruce’s leadership was its couture division.

“We always did gown preservation, but in 1997 we co-founded a group called Prestige Preservation for gown preservation and licensed that service to other cleaners around the country.”

As Arrow became more and more specialized, it added to its uniqueness. For instance, Bruce pointed out that Arrow is one of the few cleaners in the entire country that cleans fine linens, which is often a very labor-intensive task.

“There are over 20,000 dry cleaners in the United States, but there are just a handful of leather cleaners. We’re without question the most recommended nationally,” he also pointed out.

“We do more business in 10 days right now than we did the whole first year I was here.”

Bruce, who is 59, has no plans to retire anytime soon. But when he does, there is not a fourth generation Gershon to take over the family business as neither of his two children were interested in pursuing it. So at some point he believes he will sell the business.

“I’d like to think I’ve positioned the company in such a way that at the point that I’m thinking of retiring it would be a saleable entity.”

Right now he genuinely enjoys the business he’s in.

“I don’t dread the drudgery of coming to work every day. I look forward to the new day and enjoy the heck out of what I do. It’s made possible by a great group of people that work here and make up this company.”

Gershon said it was a challenge to take the business from being a small “mom and pop” operation to what it is now, while at the same time keeping true to the foundation his father and grandfather set before him.

“The emphasis today in our business is on quality,” he said. “We’re constantly studying different ways to improve our quality and training, investing in our greatest resource, our people. We want our customers to come to Arrow and feel like they are going to a place where they can get answers. Our customer service reps know how to talk to them intelligently about the items they bring us.”

He said the company’s motto really says it all.

“With every garment, every customer and every employee, Arrow cares!” ■