



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Theresa Lobraico started *Deja Vu*, an upscale Markham used clothing store, 14 years ago when she became a single mother. Even Bay Street business people buy from her.

New life in old clothes

Finding herself a single mother with three children to raise, Theresa Lobraico turned to the only thing she could: clothing.

The Markham resident had learned early on the value of buying second-hand.

"It is in my blood. I am one of six children. I looked forward to getting that great dress from two sisters."

As a legal secretary, she had shopped at second-hand stores and still managed to look sharp on Bay Street.

So, 14 years ago, when her marriage broke up, she opened *Deja Vu*, a Markham second-hand store specializing in women's clothing.

"People would be shocked to find out the level of quality here," Ms Lobraico said. "A lot of buyers are high-end executives in Toronto," she said, noting some drive Jaguars or Mercedes Benz.

Q: *What are your requirements?*

A: Everything must be dry-cleaned to look like new. Clothes must be current within two years. You can bring in an all-time classic, but we don't do vintage.

Q: *Where do you get the clothing you sell?*

A: I have suppliers (women) in Toronto and all over. You need to book an appoint-

ment. I look through the articles. They have to be on hangers in good condition. I set the price when I see the articles. I buy on consignment. I tell people not to be offended if clothing is rejected. It doesn't mean it is not great. It means I did not have a market for it.

Q: *How much of the clothing that is offered to you do you keep?*

A: At the beginning (14 years ago), I took 50 per cent. Today, I have developed a rapport with customers and sellers and I accept a higher amount. It is difficult to estimate. It is based on what the market wants, not what Theresa wants.

Q: *How do you assess which clothes are popular?*

A: I am an avid consignment shopper myself. I always go on my days off.

Q: *What got you interested in this?*

A: I always shopped resale. I could get three suits for the price of one. When my marriage broke up, my children were young — five, four and six months. I was a single mother, I put a business plan together. I had no retail experience other than a passion for fashion. I started with 25 women I thought had great clothes.

— Simone Joseph