

Beyond ghosts and gremlins,...fantasy is fun

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Halloween became controversial with some religious groups in the last ten years but although some cults adopted the holiday as their favorite it actually originated centuries ago by the Irish Celts as an observation of the New Year. Irrespective of controversy, Halloween remains

a favorite holiday of many adults and children alike. Did you ever wonder about those folks who are in the business of designing, making, buying and renting costumes? It is a retail business but in the case of Sandra Almasy, partner with Gary Geisler in Creative Costumes and Formal Wear, costumes are a life long passion. She started designing and making them as a child. If she didn't have to attend to the details of running her business she would spend all her time designing and sewing her fantasy creations.

Following the sun, Almasy came to Tucson in 1984 and applied to the three costume stores she found in the yellow pages. Offered a job by all three, she accepted a position with the Creative Costumes Company, a tiny shop located on 22nd street. Almasy and her partner Gary Geisler, purchased the business in 1992 and they currently two locations. In 2005, she is still making many of the costumes from custom ball gowns to mascots.

"The business is very competitive in ways you might not think of. There only three year round stores – low for a city this size. Most other towns of this size might have ten costume shops. During our big Halloween season, we make almost one-third to one-half of our yearly revenue. We have a lot of competition from national chains that rent mall space. Drug stores, grocery stores - almost everybody throws in costumes during this season and it is competitive," said Almasy.

"November and December are also busy so we definitely make over one half of our revenue in the fourth quarter. Springtime is a fun season – there is a lot going on – Easter, St. Patrick's and Mardi Gras. We supply schools, churches and all types of theatre costumes. Formals for proms and weddings are also a big springtime event. Summer is a time for stocking, maintenance, and sewing."

Creative Costumes focuses on four best practices:

1. Quality. "Our main focus is quality – we project a classy image – the store is beautifully organized and maintained and costumes are well kept," said Almasy. Quality is so important to this company that they recently bought their own building so they could maintain it to the standards important to their business.
2. Unique costumes. "Most seasonal stores just carry plastic packaged costume," said Almasy. "If you come in here you are going to get a unique original costume. Making our own costumes, we know how to make them durable and we have a lot of variety. We also purchase costumes, and when we do, we go to the high end. We know which vendors provide good quality."
3. Being flexible and having adaptability. The firm watches product lines closely and drops unsuccessful lines quickly without looking back. Obsolete old costumes and/or product lines are not finding a home here. In addition, Creative Costumes has a wide range of ears and tails in stock so they can modify an animal costume quickly to the customer's needs.
4. Having fun. "A very cool thing about this business is how fun it is. Everything from young drama students in their first production to drag queens to professional entertainers come in to get what they need. At least ten times a year we rent the knight in shining armor which the customer uses to propose to their girl – we always ask them when they bring their costume back how it went and the girl always accepts!"

From philanthropic causes to theatre to proms, to seasonal holidays, Creative Costumes is in the business of delivering top quality costumes and one-of-a-kind creations. The one thing that really stands out is the fun of fantasy – perhaps we could all use a little more. If Halloween is not your favorite, Creative Costumes is there all year providing whatever you need to make your business, your fundraising, and your life, more fun.

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