



Jolly Dandona and a customer at Barrington Tailor Shop.

Tailor Made for Barrington

JOLLY AND GARY DANDONA, OWNERS OF BARRINGTON TAILOR SHOP, CELEBRATE 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS BEYOND MEASURE

CUSTOM TAILOR JOLLY DANDONA turns the pages of the small photo album she keeps at Barrington Tailor Shop, the oldest establishment of its kind in town, and pauses to look at the pictures that tell the story of the business she has operated with her husband, Gary, at 112 E. Main Street in downtown Barrington, for the past 25 years.

Dandona estimates the shop has been in Barrington for about 80 years and probably had five different owners before she and Gary, an engineer, took over. Remarkably, the name and phone number has stayed the same. “Anything you can dream of, provide us with the material and we can make it,” Dandona says. She fondly recalls the starburst-patterned wall hanging she sewed from a collection of high-end ties that belonged to the

late husband of a customer, who wanted something special for her son to remember his father by, and the Christening gowns and baby blankets she fashioned from the wedding dress of a client’s grandmother.

Dandona and her team of master European tailors are experts at turning customer’s visions into realities, giving off-the-rack clothing and couture a custom-made fit, repairing alterations poorly done at other shops, and turning something old, like sentimental T-shirts you cannot get yourself to throw out, into a keepsake quilt or other sewn memento.

A PATCHWORK OF MEMORIES

Dandona flips past before and after photographs of brides in heirloom gowns that she redesigned and gave a modern look. A Girl Scout in uniform,

with dozens of badges sewn on her sash. Dancers wearing glitzy costumes. A little girl dressed as Mother Teresa in a white habit and sari with the iconic blue stripes. Each photo of Dandona’s work evokes a memory and a smile: a non-traditional bride in a red, Medieval-style custom gown of her choosing. A tall man in a custom-made leather jacket, cut to fit him perfectly. Several customers wearing one-of-a-kind Halloween costumes. An overjoyed entrepreneur modeling a prototype of a swimsuit cover-up she designed, and Dandona created, to be mass produced by a factory in China. A fur coat repurposed and made into a throw and pillows. Custom cut and sized suits. The picture of a 27-year-old Dandona, new to the business, standing next to a white-haired tailor in wire rimmed glasses, one of her original employees, makes her wonder how she raised three young children, all adults now—Crystal, Jaz, and Ajit—while building the business. Mixed in with her work is a photograph of the flowers a customer gave her and Gary when they officially became U.S. citizens more than a decade ago.

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE, POSSIBLE

“I always need a challenge, something I’ve never done before,” Dandona says. “Customers will say, ‘I went to six tailors and they all said it’s impossible.’ It’s possible for us.” She is not exaggerating. Recently, a customer came in with a dress she bought six sizes too small, because it was the only one left on the rack and she had to have it. Dandona sewed panels of matching fabric into the dress and made it look like it came that way. “You need to be open-minded with ideas and creative,” she says.

Dandona has made custom hats with fascinators like those worn by Britain’s Royal family, clothes for dogs, and sails for boats. She has sewn repairs to shoe straps, teddy bears, dog toys, and American flags—items not traditionally brought to a tailor.


“She thinks on her feet, redesigns as she goes, is not afraid of anything and is fantastic at fitting bridal gowns,” says tailor Sally Brunn, who has worked at the shop with Dandona for nearly a decade. Highly-skilled at crafting French bustles and sewing beading onto bridal gowns, Dandona gets a lot of referrals from bridal boutiques. She also has a partnership with J Crew; the retailer sends



all of their alterations to her and refers difficult-to-fit customers to the shop. A perfectionist, if Dandona is not satisfied with a job, she won't let the customer walk out the door. "It doesn't matter how many times it takes to get it right," she says. "It's a step-by-step process. You have to be patient. The fit gets better with each fitting."

LEAP OF FAITH

Born in India, Dandona learned to be handy from her father, an electrician, and how to sew by watching her mom make custom dresses for the family. After Gary read in the newspaper that Barrington Tailor Shop was for sale, he suggested she leave her sewing job with a medical supply

company, that was moving out of state anyway, to become an entrepreneur. "I always wanted to own a business," Dandona says. "I never thought it would happen that fast. He found it and had faith in me that I could do it." 

Barrington Tailor Shop is open Tues. through Fri. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sat. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Open after-hours by appointment. Closed Sun. and Mon. Visit www.barringtontailor.com, or call 847-381-6411.

Melanie Kalmar is a freelance writer specializing in business and human-interest features. When she is not writing, she enjoys spending time with her family.

Custom tailoring services for men, women, and children

- Alterations (suits, bridal gowns, couture, dance costumes, everyday wear, denim)
- Dressmaking
- Prom dresses (serves high schools in Arlington Heights, Barrington, Buffalo Grove, Cary, Lake Zurich, Palatine, and Wheeling)
- Wardrobe resizing after weight loss
- Restyling
- Sews, repairs and restyles leather, suede, and furs