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Lafayette Fashionista: Being in the Right Place at the Right Time

By Diane Claytor



Lafayette Fashionista Graciela Guerrero-Reynoso, right, assists customer Tanya Woodward with her purchase. Photo Diane Claytor

On a warm summer day in 2013, San Francisco native Graciela Guerrero-Reynoso was shopping in Lafayette, enjoying all the cute stores in the area. Walking up Brown Avenue, she saw a consignment store and decided to go in, thinking maybe she'd find a bracelet or a sweater. She walked out with far more.

Guerrero-Reynoso, the soft-spoken mother of three and grandmother of eight, had spent more than 35 years commuting to San Francisco and working in corporate finance. When her youngest child graduated from college, Guerrero-Reynoso thought it was finally time "to start doing stuff for myself." So she left the business world. Always one who believed in giving back, Guerrero-Reynoso had volunteered for several different organizations even when she was working and raising kids; once she retired, she became an even more active volunteer with even more organizations. After several years, she decided that she was juggling too many things and perhaps it was time to move on to something else.

And then came that fateful shopping day in July 2013. Walking into the small consignment store, Guerrero-Reynoso saw a for sale sign on the door. "Working in the corporate world," she explained, "you had to dress a certain way. With three kids, I couldn't always afford to dress in the manner I believed appropriate. So I'd go to consignment shops in the city, finding the best suit

I could for a great price and feeling really good about it. Owning my own consignment shop was actually on my bucket list," she noted. Seeing that for sale sign convinced Guerrero-Reynoso that she was in the right place at the right time.

The shop had been owned by Kimberly Wheeler for more than 40 years and she was ready to retire. Guerrero-Reynoso's husband, a corporate banker, came; meetings took place and within several months, Guerrero-Reynoso was the proud new owner of a consignment store. The building, once a private home in an area known as Lafayette Acres, was renovated with the help of Guerrero-Reynoso's family. "We discovered a fireplace that had been covered up, hung beautiful chandeliers, removed carpeting and wallpaper and made the shop mine," Guerrero-Reynoso said. Definitely a fashionable dresser herself, her family came up with the name Lafayette Fashionista and Guerrero-Reynoso moved forward, working with the adage that "your smile is your logo, your personality is your business card and how you leave others feeling ... is your trademark."

With the support and advice of Wheeler, Guerrero-Reynoso quickly learned the business. It's been challenging, she admits, but she loves what she's doing. She loves offering upscale womens' designer clothing at reasonable prices; she loves meeting and helping all the wonderful people who come into her store looking for a great bargain and those that have gently used, high quality items

they want to sell.

This latest venture has also allowed Guerrero-Reynoso to continue giving back. One of the first things she did as the Lafayette Fashionista is partner with Wardrobe for Opportunity (WFO), a 20-year-old nonprofit organization that, according to its website, "empowers low income individuals ... to acquire interview skills, professional clothing and career support."

With the approval of her consignors, clothing that doesn't sell after several months is donated to WFO. They then have good quality clothing to offer their clients who are ready to interview for or begin a new job. Additionally, every quarter, Guerrero-Reynoso holds a "seasonal blow out" sale and donates a sizeable percentage of her proceeds to WFO.

Darice Jones, executive director of Wardrobe for Opportunity, describes Guerrero-Reynoso as a fantastic, heartfelt businesswoman. "She is one of those very rare individuals who sees her business and connecting it to community service as non-negotiable ... it's part of her personal obligation," Jones said. "She's made personal donations, donations from her excess inventory and gives us a significant portion of her sales proceeds - more so than any other partner. I can't say enough about her as a woman or as a businesswoman."

A sign hanging in Guerrero-Reynoso's small office states, "The purpose of my life is to serve in a way that brings joy to myself and others." It appears that she's accomplishing this every day.

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