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## Luxury merchandise, customer service propel Classic Collections' expansion



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Creative business practices and top-notch customer service — that's how Sally Kimball says she's been able to keep her luxury consignment boutique open in the struggling Royal Poinciana Way business district the past eight years.

Recently, Kimball expanded Classic Collections at Sunset Avenue and North County Road, when she acquired the 800-square-foot space next door and last week finished a \$50,000 renovation.

"It's worth it," Kimball said of the expansion. "I've put it back into the business. I have tremendous faith and confidence in the area. I think it's still the center of town."

She said even though the shop might look new and fancy, she still offers the same great discounts.

Kimball said business has improved every year since she opened. For the first time in several years, she was able to keep Classic Collections open in the summer, albeit only Thursday through Saturday.

The doubling in size will allow Kimball to display more of the boutique's high-end merchandise, from Chanel and Hermes clothing to Tiffany's fine jewelry, in a separate "VIP" showroom. There also will be more room for inventory and administrative operations.

Kimball said she's needed the extra space for years but especially since last fall when the store became a member of 1stdibs.com, an online marketplace for luxury retail, according to its website.

Being able to post merchandise on the platform allows Kimball to reach more customers, find new consigners and ultimately sell more items.

"The 1stdibs agreement has really elevated us to a totally different level," Kimball said. "We had done our own website before but we didn't have enough power to drive our consigners to our store."

Kimball and her eight-person staff sell three to 10 items a week through the site, she said. They range in price from a couple of thousand to tens of thousands.

She said customer service is what keeps shops like hers in business. Her motto is: "Always be nice."

Whether it's waking up in the middle of the night to write an email so a buyer in Libya gets merchandise first thing in the morning or staying open late for a last-minute shopper from The Breakers, Kimball said she goes the extra mile. She even includes a line item on her budget to pay for customers' parking tickets.

Innovation also has helped Kimball stay afloat.

She's traveled to Abu Dhabi to buy merchandise from royal sheikas, sent letters to estate attorneys offering to handle abandoned wardrobes, and most recently began Bring Your Baubles Monday. (On the first and third Mondays of the month, people can bring in fine jewelry for professionals to appraise or buy.)

"You've got to keep the ideas going," Kimball said. "You have to think outside the box."

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