

# Thriving Over the Decades

## THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS BEHIND WALDEN CLEANERS

Many things have changed since the 1920s, including the name of the long standing Norman business Walden Cleaners. All the way back, in 1933, Walden Cleaners changed its name from Evans and Burt Cleaners. However, little else has changed about the 84-year old Norman staple.

While the original location on Classen Boulevard just north of Main Street is closed now, Walden's has added four locations in Norman over the years. They still use the same cleaning process today as they did for the Navy sailors stationed in Norman during the 1940s as well as when the Barnum & Bailey Circus rolled into town in the 1980s. The process that made Walden's successful during an era of sharp lines and pressed suits is what still drives the business today. Today's patrons can still get their clothes hand pressed on the very same press purchased during World War II, shared Fred Walden, a second generation owner of the family business.

"We have over 80 years and three generations of experience in the industry. The old fashioned way of dry cleaning still is the best," agreed Tonny Walden, a third generation and current owner. "We still hand press and finish every garment. We believe in good old fashioned dry cleaning, laundry and customer service."

And, they do it all right here in Norman.

"We have a saying, why outsource it when we can do it just as good," Tonny explained.

Being in Norman is important to the Waldens and the connection between their family and the community remains near to their heart.

"It's a family business first," added Sara Walden, secretary and wife of Tonny. "How we clean hasn't changed and our customer service hasn't changed."

And that, the Waldens believe, is the secret to their long-standing success.

"If you don't find a way to be here for the community, you won't have a place," explained Tonny. "The Norman community has been what has kept us here. We have all been born into this community. We are invested here."

Over the years, each new generation of owners faced their share of challenges as they navigated the changing times.

"Every generation that has taken over has been hit with an economic downturn," Tonny remembered. "My grandparents started in 1933 right before the Great Depression, my parents took over in the late 70's right before the oil crash in the 80s, and my wife and I took over in the late 2000's right before the housing crash. But, it has made us stronger."



Left to right: Tonny, Sara, Kaden, Carolyn and Fred Walden

Many of those challenges have, in the end, been for the better. Walden's has found a way to stay their path while adapting to the changing world around them. As with just about every aspect of managing our everyday life, technology has left its fingerprint on Walden Cleaners. While traditional methods remain behind the counter, that doesn't mean the customers' experience is stuck in the 1960s. It is now a digital world: customers like their communications in an instant, and Walden's is happy to oblige.



Bar code attached to each garment with each customers information

"Our customers are able to log into their account, see where their garments are within our process and get notifications throughout the day," shared Tonny. "Within our cleaning, pressing and assembly process, a garment is handled by multiple people. A barcode tracking system allows us to scan each garment as it enters and exits each area."

Walden Cleaners plans to keep adapting and to be a part of the Norman community for many more years to come.

"We continue to strive for the absolute best in quality care for our customers' garments and to provide the absolute best customer service possible," promised Tonny. — **BSM**