

PLATO'S CLOSET

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CARMEN FARANTINO

A high-value approach to the resale industry that keeps up with the latest trends and fashions.

BY: DANIEL R. AUSTIN

Carmen Farantino loves family. The owner of Plato's Closet in Vacaville Commons Shopping Center took a pause with her career in nursing so she could spend more time with her family, and then she created a second family with her staff at the gently used clothing emporium that she has owned and operated since 2020. "What I think is most important about this store is the employees," Farantino said. "Without them nothing would be the same." Farantino says her staff sometimes catches an earful from customers hoping to sell clothes that are, let's just say, more than gently used, but her employees have become careful buyers with a keen eye for detail, ensuring the merchandise at Plato's Closet offers value and style. She also says her employees embrace teamwork and communication. "It's amazing to see how I've gone from having to do everything in the store with operations, and a lot of social media when we first opened to now saying I have an idea and my staff just makes it happen."

It's not an accident that Vacaville Plato's Closet is thriving. Farantino has always been driven. She found high school annoying and left her junior year to enroll in independent studies at Solano Community College, where she completed high school and started college coursework at the

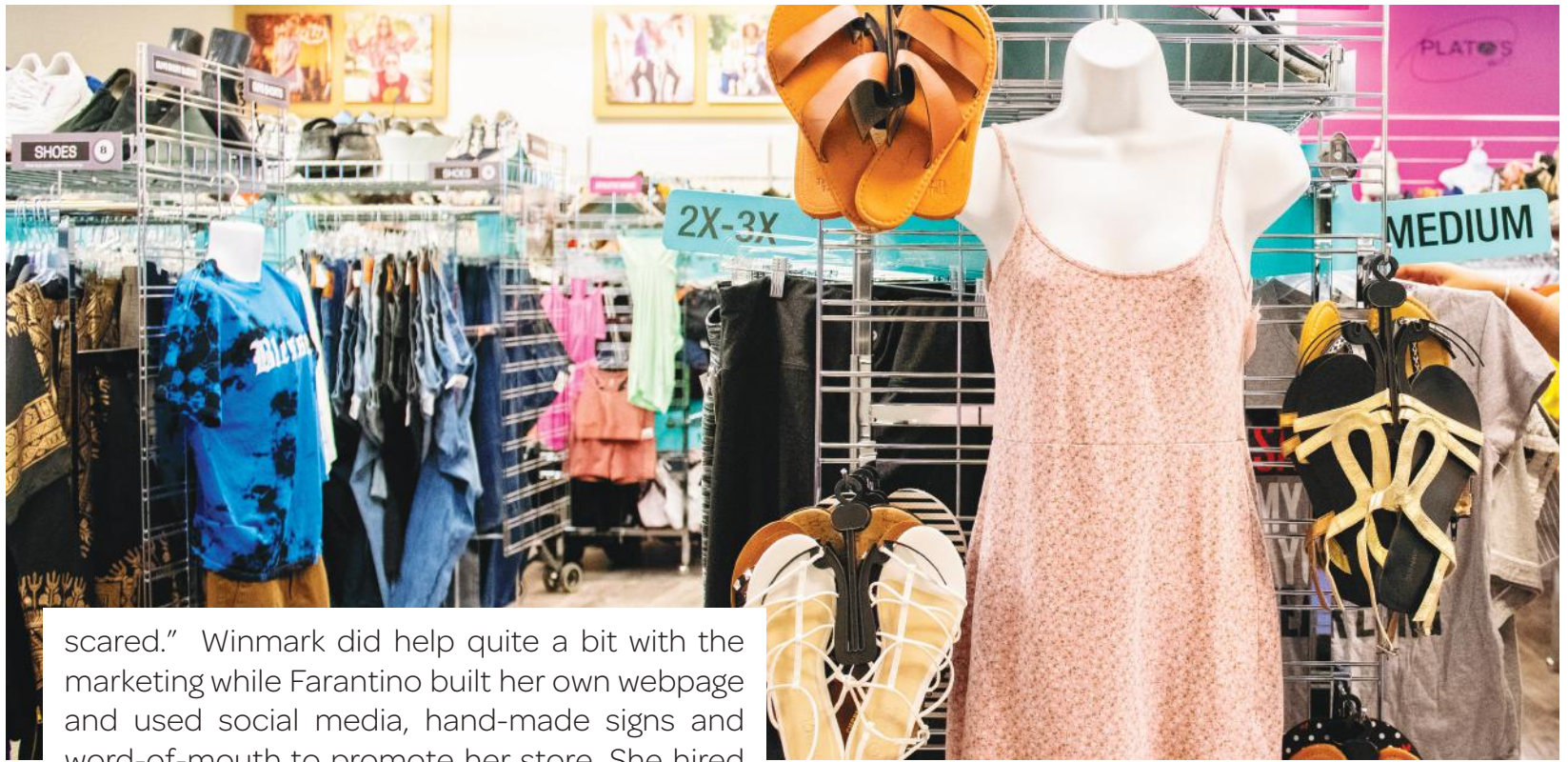


same time. She took her ADN in nursing in 2005, began working at North Bay Medical Center, and bought her first home when she was 22. "I've always had a goal of what I want to do, and I was determined to get where I wanted to go."

Before nursing, Farantino has always toyed with the idea of becoming an entrepreneur (she thought it would be Jamba Juice). While taking a pause from her 14 years of nursing, she decided to take the leap when she discovered an opportunity with Winmark, parent company to resale franchises such as Once Upon A Child, Play It Again Sports, Music Go Round, Style Encore and of course Plato's Closet. For those not in the know (I wasn't), Plato's Closet targets teens and twenty-somethings with a high-value approach to resale industry that keeps up with the latest trends and fashions. "I was excited to franchise with Winmark because my store would already have a brand," Farantino said.

There was just one problem--raise your hand if you've heard this before--COVID. Farantino found herself in an empty store with no stock, no employees, and no in-person help from Winmark. "Everything was a Zoom call," she said. "I just had a shelf and a bunch of folding tables. I was

(continued on next page)



scared.” Winmark did help quite a bit with the marketing while Farantino built her own webpage and used social media, hand-made signs and word-of-mouth to promote her store. She hired 16 employees whom she paid from her own pocket and had them bring in their own clothes to practice buying and merchandising. She sponsored a series of buy drives to stock the store, held a soft opening in March 2021 and directed a grand opening in May later that year. Today the store is lined with racks full of vibrant, stylish product, fashion spotlight walls and carefully curated window displays. “I love merchandising. I love to make the walls look pretty, dressing the mannequins, doing the front window display—even Instagram pictures. I didn’t use to be OCD before this store, but now if a hanger isn’t even, it makes me crazy.”

Farantino says much of her success is also due to the location. She turned down the Vallejo territory that Winmark originally wanted her to take, holding out until they agreed on Vacaville. And she targeted Vacaville Commons specifically. “I love this center,” she said. “I shop here myself. I’m in Hallmark and AT&T all the time. We’re like a little community.” Then, with a chuckle, she added the center’s tagline. “It’s uncommonly good.”

Fashion-conscious shoppers looking to sell or buy trendy, gently used clothing should stop by Plato’s Closet next door to Once Upon A Child in Vacaville Commons. They’ll treat you like family.

Flip Flops or Heels?
Flip flops because I love to have fun in the summer.

Mountains or Beach?
Beach because I love the water.

What would I find in your fridge right now?
It was just Super Bowl so there’s shrimp patties and left over tri tip. We had a good Super Bowl party.

What did you listen to on your way to work today?
Honestly KUIC Vacaville. We advertise there and when I’m in my car, that’s my go to.

What’s your best dish as a cook?
I don’t like to cook. My boyfriend does it all.

Who wins in a fight, Batman or Superman?
Harley Quinn. I like those movies better.

What advice do you have for a new entrepreneur?
I would say it’s going to be so rough, but it’s worth it.



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