

# A Story of SELF-RELIANCE

**B**ecause of her never-say-quit, self-reliant spirit, Anita Bedford today is the owner of two Maytag-equipped self-service laundries and three strip shopping malls in the Birmingham, Ala. area, as well as co-owner of a dental equipment manufacturing company. But the road that led to the success of this Alabama businesswoman has not always been a smooth one.

It started in 1966 when Anita was a homemaker with young children. She and her husband, who was a homebuilder, decided to act on their dreams and open a drive-up hamburger stand. While juggling the needs of their then two children, Anita jumped into the restaurant business with a passion. It was an immediate success with sales (of 19 cent hamburgers) bringing in at one time \$10,000 in 20 days. Motivated by the success of the operation, they opened a second hamburger stand. But this time it proved unsuccessful and a financial burden.



**Despite having a family of four children to raise, the responsibility of overseeing the operation of a number of family businesses and being forced to deal with problems such as a fire that burned her laundry to the ground, Anita Bedford has always been able to overcome adversity in a winning way.**

Her husband's success in the home remodeling business eventually put them back on their feet and they elected to get out of the long hours and labor intensive work of running a restaurant operation. In 1979, they opened

their first strip shopping mall. After building another strip mall (the Holly Ridge Shopping Center) in 1984 in the same Birmingham suburb of Hueytown, Anita began thinking about the self-service laundry business as a good way to help occupy the mall and add to their profit picture.

To help in her decision making, she visited a Maytag-equipped laundry in the neighboring community of Midfield owned by a Mr. Keeling. He was extremely helpful and Anita later contacted the local Maytag distributor in Atlanta (now Amerivend Southeast) after making the decision to open her own laundry.

The Bedford's first laundry, the Holly Ridge Maytag Home Style Laundry, opened in June of 1986 with 10 stacked single-load dryers and 20 top-load washers. The laundry also offered two 30-pound stacked dryers and two 35-pound front-load washers.

The 1,500-square-foot store is open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week. There are two attendant shifts that change at 2 p.m. The laundry also offers drop-off service at 60 cents per pound and \$4.50 to do comforters.

Anita, who besides running the laundry did her own maintenance and repair, points out, "I have always been mechanical.

Our children would always bring me their broken things. In fact, I kept the same dryer at home (not a Maytag) running for 20 years. I guess it is my self reliance."

Two years after the opening of their laundry, Anita's self reliance would again be put to the test. "We discovered my husband's prostate cancer in July of 1988," she explained. Without out-patient medical insurance, their financial situation again began to look dim.

It was at this time that Mr. Keeling, owner of the laundry in Midfield, decided to lend a hand to the Bedfords. He walked into the Holly Ridge laundry and said he needed to sell his laundry in Midfield (grossing \$120,000 to \$130,000 a year). "I knew he also had prostate cancer," recalled Anita. "I thought he would want a large sum for it. But he said, 'I have nobody that wants the laundry and I only want \$15,000.'



**This extremely attractive Maytag-equipped laundry received a complete face-lift when it was rebuilt following a devastating fire that totally destroyed the store.**

I went home in tears. My husband broke down when I told him."

In 1992, the Bedfords were forced to move to a new location when the lease was renegotiated. Anita drew the plans for the new location she found. With the help of her sons, she was able to move all of the equipment and have the new laundry open in six weeks and four days. During the construction, Anita would drive her husband to the site on crutches and he would sit in a lawn chair to watch. He passed away the following year.

Both laundries were doing well when the Holly Ridge operation in 1994 was struck by an arson fire. It was a complete loss, but fully covered by insurance. "I had to take the roof off and start over," stated Anita. The layout remained the same with the same array of Maytag equipment, but the decorating got a complete face lift. The attractive laundry

is done in antique rose with matching paper and paper boarders. It has pickled chair rail and rose wainscoting, as well as slate blue accents and gray glaze tables and counters.

"Business was always good but it is phenomenal now," reports Anita. "We recently had about 90 people in one day. If business stays at this pace, I may have to expand next door."

Today, the outlook for Anita appears to be very positive. But, if she should have to face another setback, she has her perseverance and commitment to fall back on. "You just do it," she advises. "Don't complain. Just do it!"



**Since the fire, business continues to experience strong growth with up to 90 customers per day.**