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Arizona Living

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2005 SECTION E

INSIDE
Calendars and crafts gift ideas
BlackBerrys may be the "it" gift this year, but for those on your holiday gift list who still prefer writing down appointments, birthday reminders, and to-do lists, here are 12 of the best 2006 calendars. **E3**

Crafty ideas: What to get for the crafter this holiday? Kathy Cano Murillo offers eight ideas from glue guns to power scissors to inspirational gift baskets. **E7**

WES ICHONDO/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

A Spotless Reputation

Upscale dry cleaner goes above and beyond the call of dirty
Jaimee Rose

On a corner of Scottsdale Road, where even the chores of life are prettied up in that Scottsdale way, next door to a gas station called Danny's Family Gourmet Market, there sits a luscious little anomaly — a dry cleaner that people actually worship.

Geralyn Phillips and her staff at Z Cleaners have never lost a Prada shirt, they replace buttons without being asked, and they deliver. They put each sweater in its own little bag with a little cedar block and even have a 24-hour automated machine that disburges cleaned and pressed Brioni suits at 3 a.m. — on wooden hangers, of course.

Because of all this, because Phillips gives picky customers behind-the-scenes tours and assures them that, yes, the Gucci blazer will be cleaned on its own, with a fresh batch of solution not contaminated by someone else's Lands' End jacket, she is the darling of the high-flying set, the goddess of their dirty laundry.

This time of year, with the goodwill flowing and the parties thumping, and the wine spilling and the wardrobes thrilling, people's hearts turn to Phillips with a mixture of gratitude and need. They send her holiday flowers and chocolates and thank-you notes — a considerable achievement for a woman who is a stop on the errand list.

And then they come to her shop at the southwest corner of Scottsdale Road and Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard with imploring eyes, handing over the red evening gown that needs to be let out last-minute, the tuxedo pants slicked with cat hair, the custom-made guest room sheets (hand press only, please). She can fix it all, quickly and so discreetly, and thus is hallowed on the lips of socialites as they sit down for cocktails.

Listen to man-about-town floral designer and event planner Robert Dyer, trilling about Phillips to friends over Pellegrino at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa:

continued on back...

A spotless reputation

By Jaimee Rose
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See CLEANER Page E4

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"What I'm crazy about right now is my dry cleaner," he raves, dishing about how she delivers and picks up his Prada shirts. "I feel like she tucks me into bed."

For Christmas, chef Michael DeMaria is cooking Phillips a private meal in his private kitchen at Michael's at the Citadel, because he loves how she remembers always to crease his chef's pants.

In this era of the \$1.50 cleaners, Phillips is doing it the opposite way. When her customers pay \$5,000 for a suit, they want to hear, she says, that it will cost \$25 to clean it. When her clients' shirts are \$250 and tailored, it soothes them to pay an upcharge on the standard \$2.75 price for

**"What I'm
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hand-ironing. They love that she places a bar code on each piece, and that her conveyor-belt system was imported from Italy. She services royalty and ballplayers' wives, CEOs and socialites, the kind of people who really adore that Phillips calls each piece of clothing a "garment," and touches the sweaters as if they have hearts.

When her husband, Steve Phillips, began the business eight years ago, the couple set out to be just slightly special dry cleaners, and then perfectionism and smart business sense took over. (Phillips is a woman who washes her sidewalk, cleans the toilets every day and never has any outdated foods in her fridge.) Now, it has evolved into the kind of cleaners that hires a marketing company for image upkeep.

"It would make me miserable," Geryl Phillips says, to send out subpar work, to let a shirt out of her shop with wrinkles on the

back of the button placket or to hand over pants with a crease ironed in just a half-inch from the seam.

"It is almost," says Phillips, 44, "like extreme dry cleaning."

Inside her shop, beyond the lobby and its granite countertops polished once every hour, it looks like Nordstrom, Tommy Bahama and Neiman Marcus exploded: a sprinkling of expensive confetti. There are the wedding gowns and the little black dresses, the ladies-who-lunch suits and the place mats, each on its own hanger. There are so many rhinestoned Bebe logo shirts, and so many Ann Taylor sweaters, and a secret stash of Banana Republic buttons, just in case.

Look, the little girls' party dresses are here, between rows of line-dancing labels: Prada, Escada, Dolce & Gabbana.

Don't look, there is dust in the corner, but also the cleanest break-room microwave ever, and rows and rows of soap, including one bottle bought especially for exacting customers.

And back here is a strange little cultural divide: a life of soiled luxury, and Phillips' happy staff - the people whose job it is to clean up the mess, for \$10 to \$13 an hour. They do not balk when the co-owner of the Coldstone Creamery empire comes in with hot fudge on his pants, do not tsk when a customer brings in drapes with red wine at the top and empty out all the pockets in silence: the condoms, the golf tees, the phone numbers. They calmly telephone the customer who always leaves his wedding ring in his pocket. They keep the dirty laundry a secret.

Bill Hayes, 32, is Phillips' stain-removal guru. He studied chemical engineering in college and is revered for his ability to get whites even whiter than you see on TV. His personal luxury comes from ironing his own jeans and his sports-logo T-shirts daily, and if he spills something, he heads right out to the car to change so as to remain "crispy clean." He can get out just about any stain, providing there has been no customer intervention.

Geryl Phillips looks at the Escada suits with lust ("someday," she says), but loves to shop at Nordstrom.

"Ohhh," she sighs, fingering a cream Gucci jacket, "I would love something like this, but



whenever I wear this color, it doesn't stay clean very long."

Sometimes, when Erica Trenary is sorting the clothes into the green-labeled bins, dividing the reds from the blacks, she'll let her mind wander to the stories behind them. "You just wonder, just what do they do for a living?" says Trenary, 26, an employee of six years. "If it's a really nice dress, you'll wonder where they wore that to."

Sometimes, she'll muse about spending her entire paycheck on one of these garments, and maybe what it would be like to have such a glittery life, to have more than her boyfriend and her promise ring.

Sometimes, Phillips will hold up one of the BCBC Max Azria party dresses that Trenary adores, and say, "This one would look so good on you," and Trenary will have just a moment to dream.

But then the drive-through chimes. It's a BMW SUV, and it's time to load up the laundry. At Z Cleaners, they carry items out to your car and lay them carefully across the back seat or place them on that little car hook.

On this day, it is Z Cleaners' most devoted customers, socialites Natalie Abreu and Justin Firestone, who do no laundry at home and are here practically every other day.

Today, Abreu's hands are trembling as she unfurls her cashmere blankets for examination. The pair are just off the plane from Hawaii, and he has proposed.

"You guys are, like, the first people I'm telling," says Abreu, 26, and Phillips just beams.

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