

Western Pa. dry cleaning company hangs on every detail to thrive, expand



Philip G. Pavely | Trib Total Media

Four Seasons Dry Cleaners owner Larry Savitz operates the counter in Squirrel Hill, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015.



By [Tory N. Parrish](#)

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Larry Savitz emphasizes the small details that customers in his Four Seasons Dry Cleaners appreciate.

His workers put golf shirts and women's blouses on special hangers to keep them from shifting. They use tissues to protect some women's tops and stopped using pins and clamps to avoid punching holes in clothing.

"I always say I like to put out clothes as if I would be wearing them," said Sue Gentile, the manager of Savitz's Squirrel Hill store who started as a presser at the company 38 years ago.

The attention to detail and diversifying the services that Four Seasons offers has allowed Savitz to expand the business to four stores even while demand for dry cleaning has shrunk with the rise in more casual dress styles.

"I like the hangers they put (the clothes) on. ... Everybody is really nice. They do a good job because I'm fussy," said customer Josephine Cuccaro, who started going to the Squirrel Hill store about six months ago.

Savitz began working in the business as a fill-in employee for his uncle, Donald Rosenfeld, who founded the company in 1960 as Super Quality Dry Cleaners in McKeesport. In 1983, Savitz bought the business. He added a Munhall store in 1988 and the Squirrel Hill store, which he opened as Four Seasons, in 2000.

Four Seasons

Founded: 1960 as Super Quality Dry Cleaners in McKeesport

President: Larry Savitz

Locations: Squirrel Hill, McKeesport and Munhall

Number of employees: 25, including those who work at a sister business, 1 Price Dry Cleaners in McMurray

Services: Dry cleaning, tailoring, boot cleaning, wedding dress preservation, cold storage for furs, pickup and delivery

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In 2005, he opened 1 Price Dry Cleaners in McMurray, a discount store where customers pre-pay for services.

"It's taken a while for customers to understand the concept, but it's doing well," he said.

His stores have 25 employees, and sales are growing by 5 percent annually, though Savitz declined to provide more detailed figures.

The expansion defies the national trend. The number of dry cleaning and laundry service businesses declined 17 percent to 21,994 between 2004 and 2014, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. In Pennsylvania, the number declined 19 percent to 768 during the same period.

The decline can be attributed to the recession, people dressing more casually and more people working from home, away from offices that require professional dress, said Alan Spielvoegel, director of technical services for the National Association of Cleaners Inc., a New York-based trade group representing 3,000 dry cleaners worldwide.

As states pass stricter regulations for the types of solvents that cleaners can use, some smaller stores can't afford new technology or more expensive cleaning chemicals, Spielvoegel said.

"It's difficult, because they have to be very careful about their costs, especially labor costs," he said.

In response to the tightening market, Savitz expanded his stores' free pickup and delivery service from the Squirrel Hill location to Munhall and McKeesport about a year and half ago. That's when he changed the name of the Munhall and McKeesport stores from Super Quality Dry Cleaners to Four Seasons to match the Squirrel Hill store.

"We wanted a fresh look, more of an updated name related to what we're doing now," he said.

Its expanded services include leather and sheepskin boot cleaning, which Four Seasons added about a year ago. It increased marketing of its cold storage for fur coats and took over some of that business that Macy's Downtown location offered before it closed over the summer.

On-site fitting and tailoring are done at the Squirrel Hill location.

Gentile cited environmental concerns, along with better cleaning methods and rising costs, as the biggest changes she has seen in her time with the company.

For 14 years, Four Seasons has used more environmentally friendly chemicals, recycled hangers and employed GoGreen bags, which are reusable garment bags that convert to laundry bags.

"I'm very big on maintaining the environment, being friendly to the Earth," Savitz said.

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