Kositchek's
150 years
and still counting

A pictorial history of a four generation, family owned clothier.
150 years
and still counting
TO THE KOSITCHEK FAMILY

Thank you for allowing me to step into your lives, and be part of the legacy of “Kositchek’s.”

- Matt McLeod
This book narrates the history and culture of Kositchek’s as a prominent Michigan business. For 150 years and four generations the Kositchek family has operated a men’s specialty store begun by Henry Kositchek in Eaton Rapids, MI. Henry soon began his business of selling dry goods from the back of a wagon. The rest is history...

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1865, THE BEGINNING

This book narrates the history and culture of Kositchek’s as a prominent Michigan business. For 150 years and four generations the Kositchek family has operated a men’s specialty store begun by Henry Kositchek in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. Soon it moved to Lansing, Michigan, where it remains today. What Henry began would eventually be passed on to his great grandson, David Kositchek.

The store today is a unique reflection of all four generations. Henry, Louis, Richard, and David Kositchek have each left their mark on the business. As this book progresses through chapters dedicated to each generation, you will understand firsthand how the fabric of Kositchek’s is uniquely woven. The transition through the years has appeared seamless because each generation learned from and built on the foundation established by the previous one.

Each generation faced days of optimism alternated with days of adversity from challenges of business cycles, changing tastes, economic and social upheavals. Days turned to years, years to generations, and, ultimately, Kositchek’s has reached the “150 years in business” milestone (54,750 days).

If you are intrigued by the Kositchek’s story, this book will help put the span of 150 years in perspective. Beyond this historical chronicle is a greater and significant achievement—the Kositchek business began 150 years ago and nurtured by four generations continues to thrive.
Kositchek’s originally had two Lansing locations at 210 S. Washington (left) and 113 N. Washington (below). 113 has remained the store’s location throughout their history in Lansing. Over the years several adjoining buildings were acquired to make up the current store. Storefront remodels reflect the styles of the day.
150 YEARS: HOW DID WE DO IT?

The logical question to ask a 150 year old business is “How did you do it?” As straightforward as the question seems, the answer is both simple and complex. It is simple in that the success of a four generation business can be attributed to core principles. They have been adhered to and passed down from each generation to the next. With each passing generation the principles remained in place but the complexities of operating the business grew.

With growth came the need to test the limits of Kositchek’s core principles. For example, exemplary service is now, and always has been, a key component of Kositchek’s core principles. As the business grew service became a much more difficult practice to carry out and do well. As simple as the concept of service is, it is one of the most difficult principles for businesses to master. One of the most obvious characteristics of a successful business is its service. Yet many businesses miss the importance and significance of this core principle. The art of good service comes naturally to those who do it well. Service must be continually fine-tuned in order to reach and maintain the desired level.

Integrity is an equally important core principle. The integrity held by each generation of Kositchek’s has proven to be instrumental in the success and longevity of this business. Honesty and sincerity have helped Kositchek’s forge a lasting relationship with its customers and with those most prominent in the clothing industry. Integrity is essential to achieving longevity no matter what the industry or vocation.

Kositchek’s has been very protective of its core principles. Each generation has maintained them and they have served the business well.
Kositchek’s begins 1865

Henry & Bella
THE JOURNEY: HENRY

1865 was an unlikely time in United States history to start a business, much less succeed. The country was young and plagued with economic and civil strife. What would eventually become a united country of 50 states had broken apart in civil war. President Abraham Lincoln had the daunting task of fighting for the civil rights of all people while reuniting a divided country.

One can only imagine that the climate for business must have been bleak, particularly in Michigan, which was then mostly undeveloped and sparsely populated. Dirt roads and miles of land between each farm and rural community served as Kositchek’s original front doors. A horse-drawn wagon would carry Henry and his wares throughout the mid-Michigan communities.

Despite these challenges, Henry Kositchek opened his brick and mortar millinery and dry goods business in 1865 choosing 141 South Main, Eaton Rapids, Michigan (where Pettit Hardware is today) as Kositchek’s birth place. This had strategic significance to the success of the business in the years to come. Two marketing components that are as significant today as they would have been 150 years ago are timing and location. Locating in a small Midwest town enabled Henry to build the newly founded business on service and dedication to its customers.

A few short years later Henry saw another opportunity in the newly formed Michigan state capital and moved his business and family to Lansing. As the dust settled and the new front doors at 113 N. Washington Avenue and 210 S. Washington were opened, it soon became apparent that he had made a wise decision. Again, location served Kositchek’s well.

Henry built Kositchek’s around integrity with strict attention to service and product quality. Little did he know these values would help his business stand the test of time and sustain it through the next 150 years and beyond.
Kositchek's early Lansing location at 210 South Washington, circa 1869.
Men’s fashions of the 1860’s remained much the same as in the previous decade. Shirts of linen or cotton featured high upstanding or turnover collars. Neckties grew wider and were tied in a bow or looped into a loose knot and fastened with a stickpin. Heavily padded and fitted coats, called “frock coats”, usually in single breasted and knee length were worn for formal business occasions. Under coat waistcoats or vests were also worn. Waistcoats were generally cut straight across the front and had lapels.

For less formal attire, a loosely fit mid-length “sack coat” continued to replace the frock coat. The slightly cut away coat was worn for more formal day occasions. The most formal remained the dark tail coat and trouser, with a white cravat. This formal outfit helped propel the tuxedo as we know it today.
This home, located at 514 North Capitol Avenue in Lansing, was commissioned by Henry Kositchek from Darius B. Moon in about 1910. It stood near the current location of Dart Auditorium on the Lansing Community College campus.

Moon was a leading residential architect, designing and building homes for many prominent Lansing residents. He worked in the Eastlake or Queen Anne style emphasizing craftsmanship paired with new uses of tile, brick, and glass.
THE JOURNEY: LOUIS

The 20th century saw many changes, challenges and opportunities that would influence the growth of Kositchek’s for the generations to come. The demand for, and interest in, fashion by the average consumer increased. Advancements in manufacturing and distribution made it more affordable and obtainable for the consumer. This spike in demand helped fuel the growth and direction of Kositchek’s. The path that Kositchek’s was taking had now been more clearly defined. The better menswear business had become the face of Kositchek’s.

Louis Kositchek joined the family business around 1905. Upon the death of Henry in 1925, Louis took over as president of Kositchek’s. Firmly established in Lansing, Louis was instrumental in making the store a model of the modern men’s specialty store. His gentle demeanor and keen business sense combined with his expertise in the menswear business moved Kositchek’s to the forefront of Lansing’s clothing businesses. As could be seen in their display windows, Kositchek’s brought fashion and quality to the area.

As the 1930’s approached the country experienced a dreadful economic downturn. Louis was suddenly faced with what would become the “Great Depression”. This would prove to be a test of the family’s resilience and ability to navigate the business through tough times while still retaining the principles and values that had sustained them for the past 65 years.

Louis guided Kositchek’s through the Depression. By the mid-1930’s, his son Richard Kositchek had joined the family business as the business and merchandise manager. A few years later, in 1938, Richard added Vern VastBinder of Battle Creek to the store’s management team as the men’s division manager. Vern became a close friend and confidant of the Kositchek family. Vern’s presence is still felt today as David often reminisces about “Uncle Vern”.

As the 1940’s began, the management strength of Louis, Richard and Vern combined with the dedicated staff, propelled Kositchek’s on their course of continued expansion. In addition to its full line of men’s tailored clothing, the store now included men’s and boy’s clothing, junior men’s wear, shoes and hats, along with many other categories of men’s and boy’s clothing including the Boy Scout department.
FASHIONS THAT INFLUENCED THE TIMES: Early 1900's

The sack coat continued to replace the frock coat for most informal and semi-formal occasions. Three piece suits consisting of matching coat, vest and trousers were worn, as were matching coat and vest with contrasting trouser. Vests were fastened high on the chest and usually styled in a single breasted fashion. Trousers were shorter than before and often had a cuff at the bottom. The trousers were creased in front and back. The blazer, usually navy blue or brightly colored or striped was cut like the sack coat but had patched pockets and brass buttons. The blazer was worn for sporting events, sailing, and other casual activities.

Shirts and neckties of the day were formal with collars turned over or pressed into “wings”. Collars were overall very tall and stiffened. Dress shirts had stiff fronts, sometimes decorated with studs and buttoned up the back. Striped shirts were popular for informal occasions. The usual necktie was a narrow four-in-hand. Ascots were worn with formal day suits, and white bow ties were worn with evening suits.

Top hats remained a requirement for upper class formal dressing. Soft felt (Homburg) or stiff (bowler) hats were worn with sack suits. Flat straw hats were worn with more casual clothing. Shoes for men were mostly over the ankle boots. Cap toe, lace up boots were for everyday wear. Formal boots with white uppers and buttons on the side were worn for formal occasions.

Mid-century remodel of the second floor (above) and main floor (right).
Upon the death of Louis in 1975 Richard became the third generation Kositchek to take the reins of the family business. Richard possessed the same qualities that his father and grandfather had and used them effectively in operating and perpetuating a business that had now operated for more than a century.

The years that spanned Louis and Richard’s operation of the business saw the physical expansion of the store that once only occupied 113 N. Washington. With the addition of the adjoining buildings, Kositchek’s grew to eventually occupy the combined store fronts of 109-115 N. Washington. This now gave Kositchek’s the most prominent spot on Washington Avenue.

Richard brought his two young sons, Jeffrey and David, into the store in the mid 1960’s. This further demonstrated the ability and willingness of the century old business to adapt and change with the times, positioning itself not only as a mainstream but as a fashion store as well.

Richard took the store to new levels of product and service offerings. With this expansion came more square footage and more employees. The store’s size and reach offered the opportunity to draw a bigger customer base, which strengthened its foundation and influence as a third generation specialty store.

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Throughout his career Richard never stopped looking ahead. He was a visionary who had the ability to think out of the box and promote ideas that were not readily used in the industry. A case in point was adding a shoe department and a barber shop inside the store. These ideas would have been met with some reservation by most at the time, but have served the store very well and continue to flourish today.

Richard had a presence in the store and the community that is rarely seen. Not only was he a business leader, Richard was also very involved in Lansing’s civic and social organizations. Sitting on many boards and committees, he continually gave back to the community. In the early 1980’s illness forced Richard to cut back his work schedule and delegate his store duties to David. Richard fought back from near death and lived many more years giving his guidance and reassurance to the operations and direction of the store. His presence was valued by all who knew him and worked with him for so many years.
FASHIONS THAT INFLUENCED THE TIMES: 1930-1945

For men, the most noticeable effect of the general sobering associated with the Great Depression was that the range of colors became more subdued. The bright colors of the 1920’s fell out of fashion. By the early 1930’s the newest men’s fashion rage was the style fashioned for the Prince of Wales called the drape suit. The new style was softer and more flexible in construction than suits of previous generations. Extra fabric in the shoulder and arms with light padding and a slightly nipped waist resulted in a cut that enhanced a man’s figure. The trouser was tapered at the bottom. This style was quickly adopted by Hollywood’s leading men. By the early 1940’s, Hollywood tailors had exaggerated the drape to the point of caricature, outfitting celebrities in suits with heavily padded chests, enormous shoulders, and wide, flowing trousers. Also called the “Zoot Suit”, musicians and other fashion trend setters adopted this most extreme form of the drape.

This trend all ended with the onset of WWII. Wartime restrictions drastically affected the men’s clothing industry. Suits were more austere with both the British “Utility Suit” and American “Victory Suit” being the primary choices of the day. Most suits were made of wool-synthetic blends, without pleats, cuffs, sleeve buttons, or patch pockets. Jackets were shorter, trousers narrower, and double breasted suits were made without vests. The usual hat of this period was the fedora, often worn tipped down over one eye at a rakish angle. Neckties were wide with bold geometric designs.
Tailoring shop (left) and tailored clothing department (below).
Kositchek's has modernized many times throughout the years. The photo on the left shows the new mid-century storefront.

The Boy Scout trading post on the second floor was designed to suggest a log cabin.
THE JOURNEY: DAVID

On July 4, 1997 Richard Kositchek passed away. This marked the beginning of a fourth generation Kositchek to run the family business. With a heavy heart David took over as President of Kositchek’s. David shares his father’s love for the business and the craft he has grown up with. Entering the 21st century, David guides Kositchek’s with the same core elements his predecessors used. Service, integrity and quality are preeminent.

David’s vision for Kositchek’s continues to evolve. With the aid of Matt McLeod, General Manager, and the Kositchek’s team, the store has been carried to its 150th year milestone by marrying the old with the new. The team has positioned the store dually as men’s fashion and mainstream clothing, allowing for a wide range of customers to find apparel to suit their taste.

The Kositchek’s team has the pulse of a fast changing industry. They have been successful in maintaining, expanding, and adding to the service, merchandise, quality, and integrity of the store that previous generations so generously passed on. David’s predecessors would be pleased to see how careful and protective he has been with the Kositchek legacy.

“My dad’s lifeline was the store. My father loved people and always chose to see the good in everyone.”

from Lansing State Journal, July 6, 1997
Our Team
Looking forward

Management Team
David Kositchek, Matt McLeod

Wardrobe Specialists
Mark Benjamin
Carl Dorman
Gary Johnson
Jerry McBrien

Gary Geisen
Kathy Babcock
Kimberly Whitfield
Lori Frich
Gary Carter
Kathy Babcock
Kimberly Whitfield
Behind the Scenes

Tailoring Experts

Jenevieve Ferrar
Hannelore Bulos
CieCc Gatchupa
Jan Bryant

Kositchek’s Hair Salon

Angela Jasmund
Doug Stone
Brenda Second
Mike Pencils

Office

Peter Holoway
Andy McCallum
Don Belonga
Jeff Belonga

Shipping & Receiving

Jill Baillargeon
Tewolde Meresa
Gilberte VanLancker
Margo Greco
The methods available for us to market ourselves to a diverse population have greatly increased in recent years. We use a marketing mix to reach our customers, understanding that people access information in many different ways and no single method will work for all.

Our display windows and in-store displays offer the public a firsthand look at the broad range of merchandise we offer. These displays are created with an artful intent to inspire, entertain and entice people of all ages and interests.

Time tested methods such as direct mail postcards, newspaper advertisements, and television, continue to support and reinforce our other marketing efforts.

Billboards are ideal for sustaining our image and brand with our elegant, easily recognizable tie and suit photographs. With strategically placed boards we can reach a large number of people who might not see our local advertising.

The internet has taken us global and have given us an opportunity to introduce an unprecedented number of people to Kositchek’s. Our website, email communications and social media are now a regular part of our marketing mix. Our “outfit of the day” photographs on social media are followed and enjoyed by our customers.

Although 21st century technology allows us easy access to the consumer, it still falls short of brick and mortar storefronts. Nothing can replace direct contact and a personal one-on-one relationship with the customer. The genuine Kositchek experience can only be appreciated by participating firsthand in all the dynamics that go into the shopping process at Kositchek’s. A combination of atmosphere, merchandise, merchandising, communication, attention to detail, and a sincere desire to build a customer relationship come together to form an experience that results in a satisfied customer. All other means of marketing support that which has taken 150 years to build—the in store personal experience that is essential to the success of the specialty store.
In recent years we have taken Kositchek’s longstanding commitment to the community to new levels with the evolution of the “Event”. By partnering with local charities we are able to create a situation that is a win for all: we provide a great venue and ambiance for the event and the attendees may get to experience our store for the first time. This is a feel good practice for all involved.

Sparrow Foundation’s “Dapper Dads” fashion show and competition is one of our most successful partnerships. This annual event is very labor intensive and is spearheaded by “Women Working Wonders”. To date, this event has raised more than $1,115,000 in support of the physical and psychological health of women in mid-Michigan. We are delighted to be part such a far reaching endeavor.

Other organizations we have supported through events include the Lansing Art Gallery, the Red Cross, Cooley Law School’s “Race for Education”, Lansing Symphony Orchestra, Silver Bells in the City, and the YMCA of Lansing. Our staff truly enjoys the opportunity to support the community through these festive events.
**Great Slaughter Sale**

**OF MEN'S AND BOYS' OVERCOATS AND ULSTERS**

For the next thirty days, every garment must be sold.

H. Kositchek & Bros.

The Reliable Clothiers.
Anniversary newspaper advertisements through the years: 92nd, 99th, 108th, 132nd and 145th.
**FACES TO REMEMBER**

There have been so many people who have served the customers of Kositchek’s with many years of dedication and loyalty. The following are just a few that we fondly remember and greatly miss.

- **Stanley Gross**  
  July 14th, 2008

- **Betty Koessel**  
  January 2nd, 2013

- **Mansfield Morris**  
  April 14th, 2009

- **Austin**  
  1996 - 2011

Gradually you got older and started to slow.  
Such a difference from when you started to grow.  
You were always alert to all kinds of sounds,  
but later in life only by habit did you make your rounds.  

Thanks for being a friend so true.  
There’ll never be another like you.

Austin was a tireless advocate for Kositchek’s. He spent many years and countless hours endearing himself to our friends and customers. To this day people mention their fond memories of the little Schnauzer named Austin.

The thought of Austin brings a smile to our faces because he was here and a tear to our eye because he is gone.

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**RICHARD KOSITCHEK**

It has often been said that Richard could walk right back in to Kositchek’s and pick up where he left off. As much as things have changed they have stayed the same. Richard held an immeasurable affection and respect for his family business. He was a visionary with a cautious, progressive nature. He was a marvelous teacher and through the course of time prepared us for the future.

Richard spent a lifetime serving the community. As a leader in business, he carried on the Kositchek’s tradition and fortified its position as a menswear specialty store. He laid the foundation for future growth insuring the legacy be passed on to the next generation.

Richard would be proud of the way David and the staff of Kositchek’s have continued on an upward path. Keeping the store current and relevant was always important to him. We often talk of Richard in the present tense and regularly look to his wisdom for guidance.

Thank you, Mr. Kositchek.
GLENN GRIFFITHS

Glenn Griffiths was a true friend and tireless supporter of Kositchek’s. His dedication to the customer and to his craft could be seen by the unending enthusiasm he brought with him each day.

Having spent his entire adult life in the clothing business, he never seemed to tire. His caring nature was evident in the way he handled young people. Glenn enjoyed teaching young customers the value of dressing properly.

We miss Glenn’s joyful heart and his calming optimism. His passing has left a void at Kositchek’s and with all of us who cared about him.

JAMES MOORE

It was with great sorrow that we said goodbye to our longtime friend and business advisor James Moore. On March 8th, 2015, Jim was allowed to rest after a long, courageous battle. In his usual maverick style he didn’t give up easily and to the end he remained connected to Kositchek’s. His contribution to our existence was immeasurable.

Jim gave us the tools and the courage to build Kositchek’s in to the strong business it is today. His years of experience in the men’s clothing industry and at all levels of the business proved to be invaluable to the Kositchek family and staff.

Jim’s consulting expertise has greatly contributed to the success of Kositchek’s, making it one of a handful of leading Men’s Specialty stores in the country. Jim, we thank you for your friendship, your guidance, and the insight you have generously imparted to us. As long as there is a Kositchek’s your presence will be felt and celebrated.
Kositchek’s: A retail family legacy

“There are no accidents in my philosophy. Every effect must have its cause. The past is the cause of the present, and the present is the cause of the future. All these are links in the endless chain stretching from the finite to the infinite.”

- Abraham Lincoln

It is humbling to think that the very floors you walk, the walls and foundation that make up the space you occupy, began under the same name in the same family, 150 years ago. It was 1865, the civil war was ending, civil strife was beginning and Abraham Lincoln would be assassinated. What a tumultuous time in our country’s history. What a precarious time to start a business.

Each generation, from Henry and Bella, to Louis and Rena, to Richard and Ruth, to present day David Kositchek, has taken its lead from their family before them. The foundation of the business established by Henry has strengthened and evolved with the passing years.

Kositchek’s stands as an example of the pioneer spirit of the 1800’s, the entrepreneurial determination of the 1900’s, and the specialty store culture of the 21st century.

Kositchek’s serves as a shining example of the American dream. Four generations and 150 years later, Kositchek’s gives young businesses and entrepreneurs the hope that they, too, can succeed. Small businesses have been the bedrock of our nation. The ability of an individual or individuals to develop an idea, product, or service, and build upon them is what has made this country great.