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Cheryl Hall-Lindsay, marketing director for the Troy store, with Saks Fifth Avenue Co. President Ron Frasch, center, and senior VP Larry Bruce.

# Saks gets makeover for 70th

Somerset store remodels 2nd floor, adds 14 designers as it marks Detroit anniversary

BY JACLYN TROP  
The Detroit News

Luxury retailer Saks Fifth Avenue once boasted nearly a half-dozen stores in Michigan, from downtown Detroit to Ann Arbor to Petoskey.

Today, as Saks celebrates its 70th anniversary in the Metro Detroit market, the New York-based company operates a single store as one of the anchor retailers at Somerset Collection in Troy.

But Metro Detroit remains an important market. Saks corporate headquarters this summer invested heavily in redesigning the

Somerset store's second floor, where women's sportswear is now located, and adding 14 new designers.

"I can't change the economy," said Kim Nye, vice president and general manager of the Somerset store. "What I can control is what happens in these four walls."

The Somerset store is important to Saks because the Detroit area is still home to a concentration of the wealthy shoppers the luxury retailer covets — despite the recession and the bankruptcies of General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC.

"There is still money in Michigan," said Ken Dalto, a retail analyst in Farmington Hills.

Though the store's designer clothing sales are ahead of last year's numbers and are trending ahead of Saks' 49 other stores, local and corporate management have taken steps

to refurbish the Somerset anchor store.

That Saks corporate headquarters earmarked money for marketing, staffing and the redesign shows that the company is committed to Michigan, Nye said.

She declined to say how much money the retailer spent on the Somerset update, but described it as "significant."

Management is hoping the new designers and layout — a sleeker décor with better lighting and upscale finishes — will appeal to new, younger customers who will one day transition to more expensive design houses like Chanel and Armani.

Saks Fifth Avenue president and chief merchandising officer Ron Frasch said the retailer is optimistic about its future in Michigan.

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# Saks

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"Saks Fifth Avenue is fortunate to have a great store, loyal customers and exceptional relationships in the market," Frasch said. "We know that our Detroit-area customers are being thoughtful about their purchases."

From business suits to cocktail dresses to Saturday afternoon casual wear, the second floor includes popular designers such as Vince, Theory and Rag and Bone that rival Saks Fifth Avenue's locations on Fifth Avenue in New York and Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, Calif., Nye said.

The second floor now looks as though it's been exported from the retailer's New York City flagship store, albeit with local touches, such as a sculpture commissioned from Cranbrook.

The store moved its formal dresses, coats and swimsuits to

the third floor, leaving the second floor as customers' go-to destination for women's contemporary and designer clothing.

Shoes, handbags, cosmetics, accessories and menswear remain on the ground floor.

Saks has played a major role in the local market, withstanding World War II and several recessions without compromising its principles: high-quality merchandise and exceptional customer service for the upscale shopper, Dalto said.

Saks' single location has established itself as a permanent presence in Oakland County, where local wealth is concentrated, Dalto said. As a specialty retailer, Saks doesn't require the same sales volume and foot traffic that mass marketers like Wal-Mart need to survive.

The original downtown store in Detroit's New Center area, across from the Fisher Building, opened on Sept. 4, 1940, and sold fine clothing and accessories to upscale shoppers for four decades.

That store moved to Fairlane Town Center before closing earlier this decade.

The original store was the retailer's fourth full-line location after New York, Chicago and Beverly Hills, Calif.

Saks later opened a now-shuttered seasonal shop in Petoskey and university shop in Ann Arbor.

The Troy store opened in 1967, two years before what is now Somerset South of the Somerset Collection opened its doors to upscale shoppers in Oakland County.

Shoppers who used to go to the New Center store remember it as glamorous yet intimidating.

"You dressed up to go down there," said Dollie Craprotta of Clinton Township, who started shopping at Saks in the mid-1960s.

"There was Jacobsen's, and then you moved up to Saks Fifth Avenue," Craprotta said. "That was the big one."

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