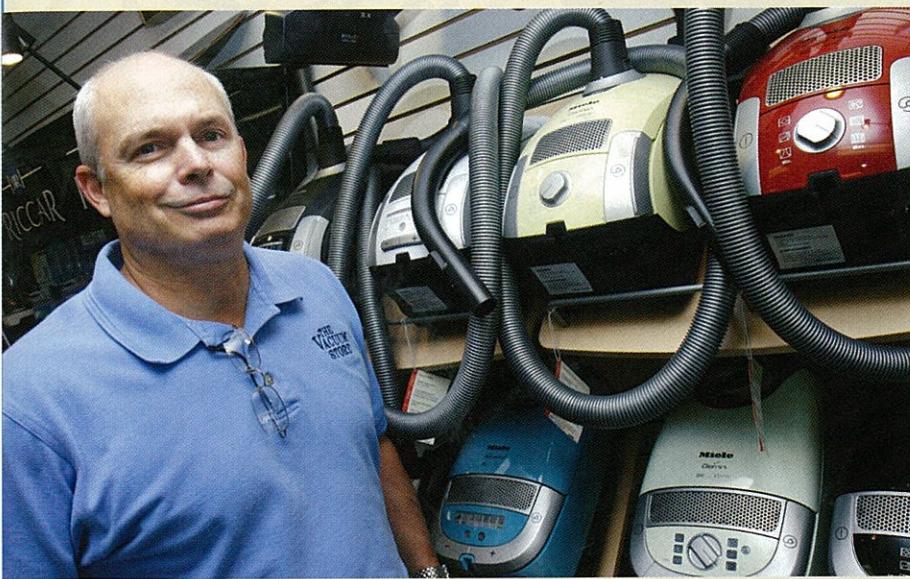


Behind the Business: The Vacuum Store

photo: Jamie Turner



It's a common refrain these days: We've become a throwaway society. Products are made more cheaply, and when they break it costs more to fix them than to buy new. Standing as an opposing example to these charges is Robert Shirey, owner of The Vacuum Store. His Hagerstown and Frederick shops offer not only quality vacuum cleaners, but all the parts you need and a team of trained repairmen. Five employees between the two locations — and an owner who's not shy about getting his own hands into the action — means turnaround time is always quick. "I enjoy fixing things," says Robert. "I always have."

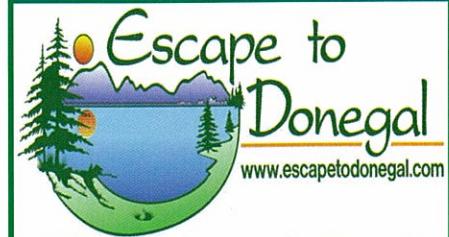
It was his affinity for repairing items that brought Robert to The Vacuum Store in the first place. "I was lucky to turn a part-time job into a great career," he says. Robert worked for the previous owner for four years before purchasing the Frederick store in 1983. After moving to Hagerstown, he opened the second shop on Virginia Avenue in 1989.

A commitment to quality products and speedy, consistent service when it comes to keeping those products running smoothly has helped The Vacuum Store hold its own through the years against big-box chains. "It's a good challenge to sell the right machine to each person," he says. "It's not just about selling to sell. That's how we keep the doors open." Robert tries to carry the best products of each manufacturer available, not just the big names. "We're here to sell the best, most durable machines — which are not necessarily the most expensive."

Operating two locations can be daunting for any small business owner, but Robert has great help. "Luckily," he says, "I have a great partner in my wife, Linda." Married to Robert for more than 20 years, Linda takes care of all their office work. And Robert doesn't dismiss the possibility of opening new Vacuum Store sites. "I would be happy if I found the perfect spot."

And in case you were wondering, Robert admits Linda does most of the vacuuming at home — but he's not afraid to help out. —*Ann Davis*

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