

# Carey re-covers furniture

This is the final story in a series on the ways Washington countians earn their living.

**BY TERRY WARD**

Feature Writer

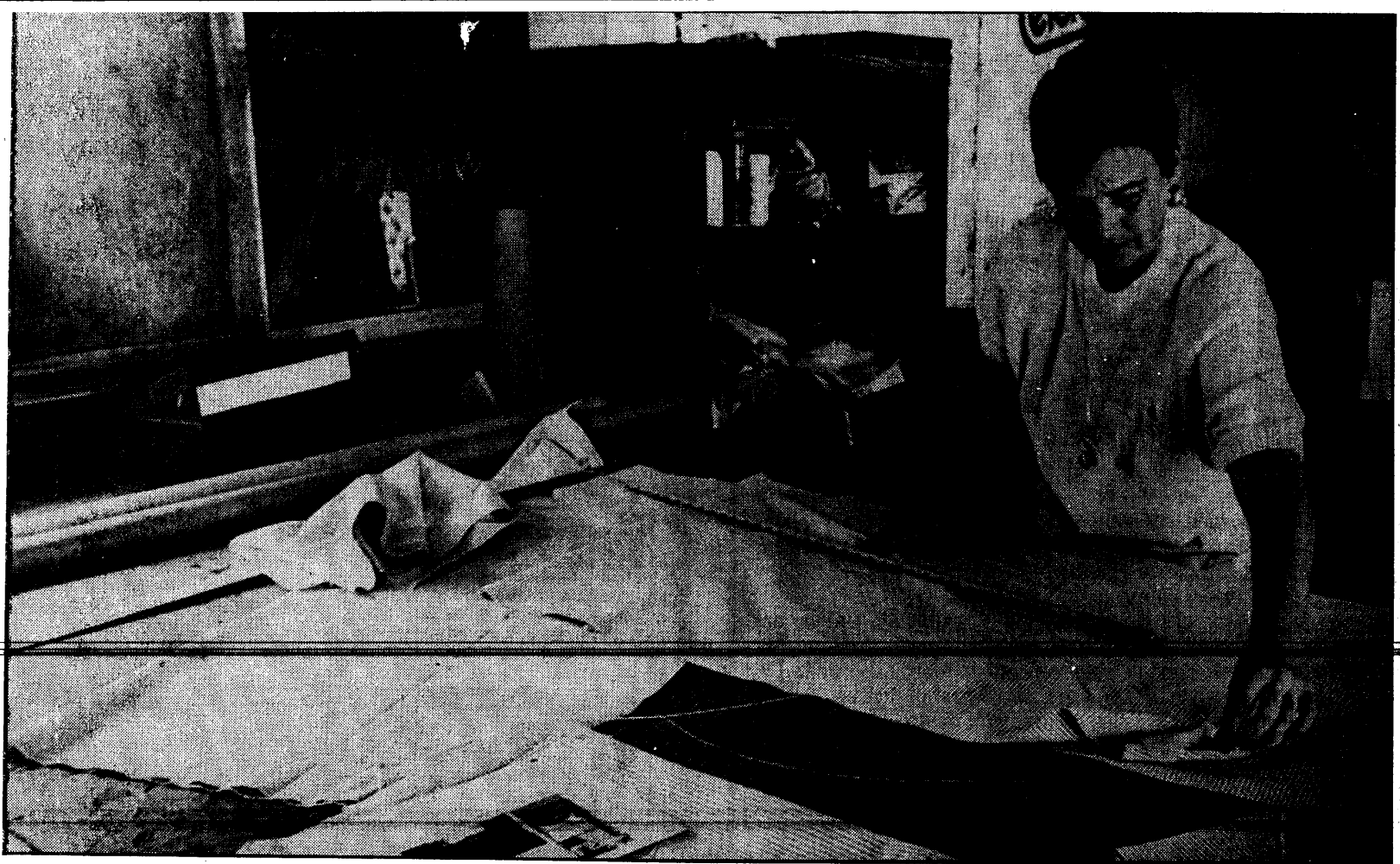
A trampoline cover sags limply on the floor of Mary Carey's decorating and upholstery shop on West Main Street, waiting for repair. "I just did another one yesterday," said the seamstress turned upholsterer and decorator.

Nearby is a fabric-covered car door panel, its corner chewed up by the family dog. It, too, waits for Carey's attention. She picks up a swatch of a similar fabric. "I'll rob Peter to pay Paul," she said, explaining that she will take an undamaged piece of the original material and repair the damaged corner and use the new—but matching—fabric in the center of the door, creating a slightly different design.

She has re-upholstered airplane seats.

"I don't like repetition," she said, smiling. "That's the main reason I got interested in draperies—I can shift back and forth."

Carey started her upholstery business in 1978.



By now she's re-doing some of the things she covered years before, often for owners who have changed their color schemes.

Her start was accidental. "I took a correspondence course," she said. Her mother had ordered the course but decided not to take the course when she opened a dinner business in her home on the Perryville Road.

"She offered it to me," said Carey. "I never finished the

correspondence course. They sent me a kit in the mail. Once I made the investment in materials, I just kept working."

At the time she was expecting her second child. A month or so after the baby was born, she opened her first shop, on Mackville Hill. She's been on West Main Street the past five

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Mary Carey

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years.

Much of what she has learned, said Carey, has come from experience. "I'd take something apart and learn by that. I'm still learning."

Even as a youngster, she wondered how furniture was put together.

The beginnings of her career may have come when she started sewing in third or fourth grade.

After high school, she earned an associate degree in interior decorating from Eastern Kentucky University. She worked

as a seamstress for Bardstown's Stephen Foster Store for 10 years.

At home, "I usually made clothes, but no draperies at all, other than a few things for myself."

Then came the course in upholstery and a business of her own. "I really get energized," said Carey, her fists clenched intensely. "I love this so much."

It's an enthusiasm her family doesn't always understand. Her son Michael, now 17, recently told her, "I'm glad you enjoy this."

"I love fabrics; I love any

fabric," Carey said, pointing to the 200 sample books that lined the shelves of her shop.

She will work in vinyl, but that's not her preference. She is prepared to work with leather, she said, "but nobody has ever followed through when they found out the price. You can't just buy a piece of leather; you have to buy a hide or half a hide."

Most of her work is for customers' homes, but she has done several projects for businesses. Her clients have included both Springfield banks and

Spring View Hospital.

"My first drapery job (at the Springfield Baptist Church) was the biggest—16 feet long," said Carey.

She did the booths at Dairy Queen, "with all the tufting. I don't mind a challenge."

When she talks to school groups, the most common question Carey is asked is how to make buttons.

"I have a button machine," she explained. There are many types of buttons—some nail backs, some with prongs that unfold, some with eyelets. "You might use all three in one application," she said, grinning.

Most of the time she works alone. "I regret that I can't be here all the time, but I have to rely on the answering machine. I go out to measure, to look at a job, to match fabrics. I'm sure I miss some drop-ins."

The amount of work determines how much overtime Carey puts in.

She spent Labor Day at the shop working; "quiet time" she

called it.

For the most part, she works alone, but calls in help when needed for tasks like taking furniture apart and for delivery and installation. Her two older children have been helping for some time, she said, "but they don't like it like I do."

"My home is like the shoemaker's kids—barefoot. I just finished a room at home," she said. "That has me excited."

Carey said she has clients in many nearby towns, even as far away as Indianapolis.

"The farthest," she said, "was a lady who moved from Michigan to Florida who dropped her furniture off and let me do it while she was moving."

She once re-upholstered a huge ottoman in the shape of a shamrock. The piece was shipped to her from England by its owners, who intended to use it in their home in Bloomfield.

There's no cash-and-carry merchandise for sale at Carey's shop. Everything she does is custom work, completed ac-

cording to the customer's instructions.

Perhaps the most unusual project, she said, was a six by seven foot headboard she designed and built for a king-size bed. "It had to be done in a hurry, in three weeks, for an open house."

Carey started with a sheet of plywood. "I had to build it from scratch. It had 75 button tufts. I had to make all the tufting." The finished product was black moire with peach-colored buttons.

In 1980 Carey was honored by the Springfield Business and Professional Women as the community's Young Career Woman. Thirteen years later, she's still expanding the business.

"I hope I'll be doing this the rest of my life. I hope someday I can slow down, but I don't want to stop. If I don't do it for the public, I'll be doing it for myself."

Are there any new lines of business she might expand into? "Who knows? I'm always ready for a challenge."