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## Alums Enter Department Store World

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# Alums Enter

# Department Store World

by Nancy Baker

SAMPLES of everyday questions popped at Iowa State graduates working in the information booth of L. S. Ayres department store in Indianapolis, are, "Little Johnnie is ill and what should I do?" "Is the Tea Room open?" "Are there any good murder mysteries playing in town?"

Being stationed at the information booth is just one of the many varied positions which the company offers in its comprehensive retailing training course. Delving into the intricacies of department store retailing are three June graduates of Iowa State—Ellen Mitchell, Letha Ronneberg and Doris Wiernsberger.

L. S. Ayres and Company recently inaugurated this retailing training course in an attempt to show that home economics training, too often thought of as highly specialized, also presents many potential positions in the business world.

Ellen, Letha and Doris were immediately given intensive training. Meetings, individual conferences, demonstrations and bulletins gave them information relating to each job and in attaining skill in the performance of the job. By observing operations behind the scenes and doing actual selling in different departments each week, the trainees were able to gain an overall picture of merchandising and service and the varied positions available in a department store.

The information booth located on the street floor in the hub of hustle-bustle activity presents the answer to many frustrated customers. While the trainees for the most part could rely on the telephone books and manuals close by, they also are required to rely on their memories, from information gained while orientating in the store and observing the city and newspapers.

THE Bridal Bureau offers opportunity to help brides plan their weddings from the moment the date is set until the honeymoon begins. Ellen, Letha and Doris help the brides in selecting the correct costumes for trousseaus. "Past training in home economics is essential in this position," stressed Ellen. "Many times the bride will want you to help choose furniture for her future home, and the assistant's advice is based on information from nearly every course offered." No service seems to be too much trouble;

*Ellen Mitchell, Doris Wiernsberger and Letha Ronneberg find department store work fascinating.*

for example a tea room supervisor soothed a troubled bride by instructing her on how to cook the favorite dishes of her future husband.

The Christmas Shopping Service now seems to be a thing of the past, but to men it is an invaluable aid in choosing gifts that will please the wife. After learning the approximate price the customer is willing to pay and any of his suggestions, the assistant accompanies him to the exact spot where he may locate what he prefers.

All three women enjoyed working in the millinery department and described it as one of the most interesting and amusing phases of their retailing training. Selling a hat offers a challenge to oneself, Ellen, speaking for the group, admitted. "The customer has definite ideas as to the type of hat she wants and it's up to you to satisfy her, and sell her a hat which complements her general appearance. It's up to us to decide whether the woman prefers the more conservative styles or is partial to the extremes. About the only way we may figure out this problem is by her dress and conversation. This is a department where it would be especially advantageous to the saleswomen to be able to read peoples' minds," suggested Ellen.

The life of a career woman is not all work and no play. Just about every weekend will find Ellen, Letha and Doris together planning something new to do or see. Plays, concerts, movies—"Life With Father," are mixed in with Fred Waring and vacationing at Turkey Run.

MANY other positions in retailing attracted the women's attention: selling and instruction in art needlework, china, linen yard goods and pattern departments; consultant and demonstrator of sewing machines; arranging kitchen layouts; fashion selling in clothing, accessories and cosmetics; advertising and copy writing, and personal and display department.

Their enthusiasm might well provide an incentive for undergraduates who are considering various positions in retailing as careers. Home economics background includes the basic principles of a women's world, and positions relating to their field are chuck-full of opportunities for women with a knowledge of art, fashion, the home and textiles.

