

New family for Millers

By Joni Scanlon

ONE of Canberra's oldest high-end fashion stores is on the market for the first time since 55 years ago.

Mary Miller opened Millers of Manuka in 1957 and the business has stayed in the family ever since, with her daughter Dorothy Roberts now the owner.

Ms Roberts said her mother started the business originally as almost a haberdashery store.

"Her dream really was to bring fashion to the ladies of Canberra," Ms Roberts said.

Ms Roberts helped her mother at the store when it first opened, before moving to Europe for two years.

On her return to Australia she settled with her husband and two children in Mt Isa until tragedy brought her back home. Her stepfather had an accident in 1971 and never recovered. After he passed away her mother needed help and so Ms Roberts went back to work at the store.

After her mother was in a bad car accident in 1980, Ms Roberts took over the store and has been running it ever since.

In her role as overseas buyer she was responsible for finding new merchandise.

"I go to Europe twice a year to do the collections," she said.

Her trips took her to Milan, Paris, London and Germany. Accompanied by her daughter Sue, they would enjoy private viewing of the latest collections from Armani to Missoni.

"They have models there to show us the ranges and then we decide what we want to buy," she said.

Ms Roberts would then carefully choose which pieces to bring back to her Canberra customers.

"You really do know after many years - I know what will suit the Canberra market," she said.

"What sells in Milan may not possibly sell in Canberra so you're really looking to your own market.



Millers of Manuka owner Dorothy Roberts is selling the business after 55 years.

Picture: Elesia Lee

"Many of our clients want investment pieces."

Ms Roberts said the family business had become something of an icon in Canberra and had many local customers.

"I feel privileged that I've been able to look after all my wonderful clients all these years," she said.

There are customers today who used to shop at the store when it was

run by Ms Miller, something Ms Roberts is very proud of.

Now though it is time for the store to have a new owner. Ms Roberts plans to spend time travelling and taking up new challenges.

"The business may be on the market, but Millers of Manuka is not closing its doors," she said. "I think it would be a terrible loss if it didn't continue."

"Once a suitable owner is found, we'll work closely together through the transition period. With fashion collections for next year's winter and summer seasons already purchased, we're hopeful the icon that is Millers of Manuka will continue unabated into 2014 and beyond."

Expressions of interest about the store can be emailed to Millman7@bigpond.com