



# Business

The Aces on Bridge,  
Dr. Gott columns debut

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Jobs, Rentals & Wheels

## Mr. Green Clean

### Dry cleaner switches to eco-friendly method

By Tim Krohn  
Free Press Staff Writer

**NORTH MANKATO** — Harlan Kretsch is a happy dry cleaner.

He recently got rid of his old cleaning machine that used a chemical that has raised health and environmental concerns and replaced it with a machine gentle on the environment — and on clothes.

"I'm so glad that old machine's out the door. This thing's wonderful," said Kretsch, who's owned Like-Nu-Cleaners on Belgrade Avenue for 25 years.

The equipment, he said, saves money on disposing of hazardous waste, is more economical, doesn't smell and cleans items such as leather and sequined gowns like he couldn't before.

"Sweaters are softer, colors come out more vivid and the clothes don't smell at all. It's amazing."

The dry-cleaning industry is moving away from using the chemical perchloroethylene, or perc. Perc is a great cleaner, but it's also listed as a probable carcinogen. It's been found in the soil and ground water under dry-cleaning businesses around the country and is being phased out as equipment is being replaced.

California has passed legislation that phases in a ban on the use of perc and a number of other states are expected to follow suit.

"I figured if California was doing it, it would be here soon," Kretsch said.

But mandate or not, he's glad he's made the switch.

"I've been fighting that perc for 25 years. It stunk, the clothes stunk, it was nasty."

It was also expensive. Dry cleaners are required to capture the used chemical and have it picked up and handled as hazardous waste. "It cost me \$693 to get rid of the last (perc) sludge and filters."

In the last few years a number of companies have come out with non-perc machines. Kretsch settled on a Columbia brand that uses a petroleum-based hydrocarbon solvent to clean.

The use of petroleum-based solvents is actually a return to the roots of dry cleaning.

The dry-cleaning process has been around for two centuries. Most credit



Photos by John Cross

Harlan Kretsch of Like-Nu-Cleaners in North Mankato says his new dry-cleaning machine is not just environmentally friendly, but cleans clothes better and more gently.

Frenchman Jean Baptiste Jolly with the idea after he noticed his tablecloth became cleaner after his maid spilled kerosene on it. Early dry cleaners used petroleum solvents such as gasoline, albeit the fire danger led to searches for different chemicals.

Thomas Jennings — the first African American to receive a patent — patented the "dry scouring" cleaning method in the United States in 1821.

In the 1930s, perc became the chemical of choice for dry cleaning because of its excellent cleaning power and non-flammable nature.

Cindy McComas, with the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program, said new nonflammable petroleum-based solvents have emerged as an alternative to perc.

There are about 200 dry-cleaning plants in Minnesota (but many more drop-off sites) and only about two dozen have switched to non-perc technology. McComas expects the number to keep growing.

She said perc, which is also used in other industries for cleaning parts, is increasingly coming under regulatory pressure. And, she said, more employers are concerned about potential liability because of their employees working with perc.

"I wouldn't be surprised if over time it were banned."

Still, she said some dry cleaners are choosing to replace their equipment with a new generation of perc machines, which she said are much improved.

"I'm not a big fan of perc, but the new machines are much more efficient and safer."

Kretsch said that unlike his old equipment, his new machine doesn't require a distiller or steam. Employees use a touch screen to set codes for different types of clothing. Air blows lint, dirt and particles out of the clothing before the cleaner is sprayed on the tumbling clothes. The process takes about 40 minutes.

Kretsch said cleaning leather used to be difficult because the process would pull oils out, making the leather dry and sometimes discolored. And beaded or sequined clothing was difficult to clean without damage, he said.

"You can set this and it's very gentle on leather and beads."

Kretsch said the newer machines can be less costly up front. Industry groups say the new green dry-cleaning machines generally run in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range, depending on the size.



Irene Kretsch likes the new automated dry cleaning equipment, but there are still some jobs that are done the old-fashioned way.

## Dividend reinvestment plans offer investors low-cost stock possibilities

With price consciousness and diversification so vital to investors in an uncertain year, dividend reinvestment plans fit right in.

DRIPs, as they are commonly called, are company-run plans that allow you to invest in a firm's stock with a modest initial outlay and continue to reinvest dividends to buy additional shares. You can also make addi-

tional purchases of shares from the company.



ANDREW LECKEY  
Tribune Media

Of roughly 1,100 available DRIPs, around half permit you to buy your initial stock directly from the company with no broker needed. The rest generally ask that you initially buy stock from a broker to start out in their plans.

Low initial outlay and gradual buildup at fluctuating

stock prices allows for dollar-cost averaging to smooth out risk. You can join additional DRIPs of other companies' stocks on your way to diversifying. Many companies boosted their dividend payouts in recent years, a plus for the growth of your holdings.

"A lot of people are jittery about this market, worried they'll be getting in at the top but still wanting to be in the market," said Vita Nelson, editor and publisher of The Moneypaper (which has a

searchable DRIP directory at [www.directinvesting.com](http://www.directinvesting.com)) in Rye, N.Y. "With DRIPs, you can start out with very few shares and continually build your holdings at different price points in a volatile market."

Based on recent inquiries to this column, investors are intrigued by the concept. Some individuals will always prefer stocks over mutual funds because they like to follow a company, though DRIP investing can't provide the

diversity of a mutual fund owning dozens or hundreds of different stock names.

DRIPs require that you be a careful record-keeper for tax purposes so you're aware of the cost basis, or original price, of stock holdings you're amassing. A few investors do get carried away with a case of DRIP fever, going far beyond simply building a portfolio to almost turning them into collectibles — too many of them virtually identical in characteristics.

"I tell investors they should buy three or four DRIP stocks first and see how they work for them, then continue to add new plans to the mix," Charles Carlson, editor of the DRIP Investor (which publishes an annual directory available for \$14.95 at [www.dripinvestor.com](http://www.dripinvestor.com)) in Hammond, Ind. "However, you don't want to get into 20 stocks in six months or acquire them like baseball

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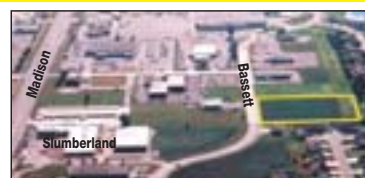
## April Commercial Real Estate Opportunities!

### ADAMS STREET



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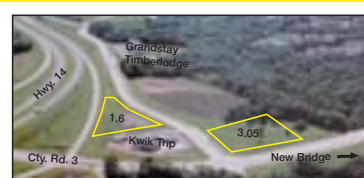


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