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Sam Muaddi, owner of Moorestown Auto & Boat Upholstery in Moorestown, sews fabric pieces together for seats for a McDonald's restaurant in Mount Laurel.

Sew

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When his brother came to Delaware County, Pa., Muaddi joined him and learned the business.

But his dream was to be on his own, and in February 1983 he found a promising location in Moorestown.

The West Camden Avenue building suited his needs perfectly and, by then a husband and father, he made the move with his young family.

Since that winter day, a parade of classic cars in need of makeovers has found its way to his shop. They include a 1948 gold-colored Hudson, a red 1917 Buick with wooden wheels, a rare 1951 British-made Austin, and a pink 1955 Cadillac that is an exact replica, stitch by stitch, of one ordered by Elvis Presley for his mother.

The elaborate details include an embroidered "E" and musical notes in the carpet.

"Elvis ordered it just like that," said Muaddi, who completed the work two years ago.

The car is part of a fundraising project for the American Cancer Society and is touring the country.

"People pay to have their pictures taken with it," Muaddi said.

One of his most unusual projects was refurbishing the interior of half a car. Like Presley's, it was a pink Cadillac, but this one had

been cut in half so it could be mounted on the wall of a restaurant in New Castle, Del.

Many of his customers are serious car collectors, but others are looking to recapture happy memories from their youth, like the middle-age man whose restored Chevrolet reminds him of long drives years ago with his father.

Muaddi's native village, Taybeh, is an ancient place mentioned in the Bible. Located 10 miles from Jerusalem, it is a historic Palestinian site and a favorite with tourists.

He is one of nine children, most of whom left that troubled area for the United States. His four children, now adults, include a lawyer, company vice president and published novelist. All graduated from Holy Cross High School in Delran.

His wife, Alice, is active in the business, helping with the book-keeping and assisting customers. Early each morning, the couple, who live in Maple Shade, arrive at work, turn on the coffeepot, and set out on a brisk walk and jog around the neighborhood.

Their love of walking extends to weekends, when they sometimes clock 10 miles.

At present, Muaddi has two employees and each owns a part of the business. He has no plans to retire, but he does imagine a day when he might be less involved.

"I love my work, but I will take a backseat and let the younger people drive," he said.