

Fresno fixture closing shop

Downtown changes lead Fink & Skopp owner to shutter 84-year-old store.

Owner Gary Skopp says lack of free parking downtown, increased competition and changing demographics led to closing the store.

Downtown furniture store owner Gary Skopp is calling it quits, closing the family-owned business after 84 years.

"It's sad to see a business go," said Skopp, owner of Fink & Skopp Home Furnishings. "But things change, times change."

Skopp says a lack of free downtown parking, increased competition and changing demographics were all part of his decision to close the store.

Founded by Samuel Fink in 1920, the Van Ness Avenue store was part of Fresno's one-time "furniture row," a group of downtown stores that included Slater's, Josephine's, Fashion Furniture, McMahan's and Daniels Columbia.

"Everybody was down here, but one by one they left or they closed," said the 66-year-old Skopp. "Now, it's our turn."

It's been a tough road for some longtime downtown retailers. As the city grew north, large stores followed, taking customers with them.

Although Skopp's customers have been loyal — some have shopped with the store since the 1950s — they are getting older, and the new generation of furniture shoppers has more choices.

Today's consumers buy furniture online, at discount stores or super-sized furniture retailers with acres of free parking.

"It's hard to compete against that when my customers have to keep going outside to feed the meter," he said. Stanley Kooyumjian, executive director of the Downtown Association of Fresno, said that while it is unfortunate that Fink & Skopp is

closing, downtown still is generating interest from developers intent on building new retail spaces and housing.

"Things are changing," Kooyumjian said. "And there is a demand for things like housing."

Skopp admits he agonized over closing the operation. He's the third generation to run the store, and the business has been his career for more than four decades.

Much like his father, Skopp never intended to get into the furniture business, but family demands pulled him in.

Skopp was a recent graduate from the University of California at Berkeley when his father, Joseph Skopp, asked him to help relocate the store from Broadway Avenue to Van Ness Avenue in 1960.

Three decades earlier, Samuel Fink had asked his son-in-law Joseph Skopp to move the store from one building on Broadway to another. The elder Skopp, who died in 1993, was a pharmacist in San Francisco at the time.

"We both came and we stayed," Skopp said.

Inside his cramped second-floor office are dozens of memories from Skopp's 44 years in the furniture business.

His desk chair has chiseled chunks of plaster out of the wall after years of backing into it.

An avid sports fan, Skopp appears in numerous photos with famous sports figures visiting Fresno for fund-raising events. The photos include former Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda, legendary Penn State University football coach Joe Paterno and former San Francisco 49ers coach Bill Walsh.

Skopp also has an autographed photo of the 1983 NIT championship Fresno State basketball team. Skopp used to employ several of the players.

"Those were some good times," Skopp said.

Above all else, Skopp says he will miss his customers the most.

Among his most loyal is 75-year-old Ann Babcock, who bought her first upright freezer from the store 50 years ago and has bought many items since.

"They are good people because they knew how to treat people right," said Babcock, who recently bought a DVD player from Fink & Skopp. "If you couldn't pay everything, they let you make payments. That's the way a lot of us paid for things."

Skopp hasn't decided what he will do in retirement, other than rest. And he's not sure when the store will close. He has until the end of the year before his lease runs out.

The building is the former site of the Sequoia Hotel and is owned by Steve Pilibos.

"A few stores have called about wanting to merge, but I'm not sure what I will do," Skopp said. "All I can say is that I am retiring from here. I am sort of worn out."

Local business close to shutting its doors

By Shawna Richter

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The Porcelain Product Company, 510 North Pearl St., has experienced an economic hardship.

Kim Pierce, executive director of Macomb Area Industrial Development Corporation, said in a release on RadioMacomb.com, that PPC will be closing its doors in mid-to-late February to consolidate with the PPC branch located in Knoxville, Tenn.

PPC's closing will layoff 171 employees, meaning these workers will no longer get paychecks to pump back into the community.

Dennis Basset, spokesperson for PPC, is unable to comment until the final papers have been signed.

In an interview with Pierce, she was hesitant to speak because of her department's close relationship with PPC. However, she said that PPC's closing "won't be devastating for the community. It will be for the families."

Pierce said workers would start being "let go" within the next few days. In those few days, Macomb businesses will start to feel the effect of the closing.

"When major breadwinners lose their jobs, it's a problem," Pierce said.

According to Pierce, with the loss of paychecks, families will "have to tighten their belts."

Without that cash outflow, companies in the area will feel the lack of income. Pierce said the lack will not cause other businesses to close, but it will have an impact.

She said that PPC's closing "won't stop the community — (the community) will go on."

Other companies in Macomb are already looking to expand in order to make up for the loss of money, Pierce said.

However, that doesn't mean that Macomb and McDonough County officials didn't try to stop the consolidation from occurring.

In a statement posted on RadioMacomb.com, the Macomb and McDonough County officials offered about \$1 million to PPC corporate leaders as an incentive to consolidate to Macomb.

Macomb Mayor Tom Carper said that in his opinion, the workers and the facility are superior at the Macomb location. Carper also said that there is not much locally here to preserve jobs, and he is convinced Macomb did not have an equal chance in getting the company location

Acadia Motors in Madawaska to close doors

Thursday, March 11, 2004 - Bangor Daily News

MADAWASKA - Roger Pelletier's office is full of souvenirs from his years of doing business in Madawaska, but that will all end sometime soon when the doors at Acadia Motors are shut by creditors. As a result, the Aroostook County town with the highest per capita income will become a town without an automobile dealer.

Pelletier, 74, the town's Ford and Mercury dealer from 1961 to 2001, is seeing his business career, which started when he bought a gasoline station in 1954, coming to an end. He has been selling vehicles in Madawaska since 1958 and bought Acadia Motors in 1961.

The sign out front says "closing sale."

The business will be the second in Madawaska to close its doors in 2004. Fashion Bug closed around the holidays, and there are reports of other business closings in town. Some of those, however, are just rumors.

Ryan Pelletier, owner of Rumours Pub, said the reports of his business closing are rumors. It's much the same with the purported closing of Radio Shack. Jacques Pelletier, owner of the electronics outlet, said his store is open and will continue to be open.

Coed Fitness, a Main Street gym, may close. Judy Pelletier, owner of the gym, said she is looking for someone to buy the gym and keep it open. If not, she will sell the equipment out of town.

There are 13 vacant storefronts on Main Street, and the former Ames Shopping Center still is empty.

There have been several new businesses opening in town recently, including Dollar Deals and More, Trenz Shirts, a T-shirt and clothing store, Frozen in Time, a scrapbooking store, and One Call, a cleaning business, which just opened.

"The biggest problem of doing business in Madawaska is people shopping out of town," Roger Pelletier repeated several times Wednesday afternoon while sitting in his office. "It's been getting worse since Fraser [Nexfor Fraser Papers Inc.] went to 12-hour shifts.

"People working there have more time to go out of town for two or three days at a time, and it hurts local business," he said. "Every time someone shops out of town, it hurts the town. Once a dollar leaves town, it does not come back."

He went on to say that "people don't shop in town anymore saying there's nothing here, and that's because they've been shopping out of town. I stopped selling snowmobiles years ago because people would buy them in Presque Isle to save \$50."

Judy Pelletier's reasoning is a bit different, but it also involves the town's largest employer.

"It's all a trickle-down effect," she said. "When Fraser makes cuts, it affects everyone."

Last spring, Fraser cut nearly 300 jobs at its Madawaska and Edmundston, New Brunswick, operations.

"This is the fourth time people of this town have me [supposedly] shutting down," Ryan Pelletier said of Rumours, his restaurant and nightclub. "If people put as much effort in supporting us as they do talking about us, business in this town would be great.

"The rumors about Rumours have happened many times," he said. "We are not

closing."

The businessman even put up a sign stating that fact in the front window of his Main Street business.

Roger Pelletier remembers when Madawaska had four automobile dealerships.

In 2000, Acadia Motors had 20 employees, plus its owner. The businessman recalled selling 40 cars a month. Now he has a hard time selling 10 cars a month.

Those jobs, which included office clerks, mechanics, salespeople, and body shop personnel, have dwindled, and soon the rest will be gone.

The four local dealerships have all closed. The nearest automobile dealer now will be in neighboring Frenchville, which has two.