

It's get glitz quick on the mall

Long-time business owners view boutiques as trend

By DENISE FRANKLIN
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GLITZ. Sell-'em-the-sizzle instead of the steak. Razzle dazzle. That's a developing business mood on Pacific Garden Mall. But long-time shop owners say they don't feel threatened. They've seen trends come and go and believe this one is another passing fancy. Boutiques, schmoutiques, they think. A flash in the pan.

Take Kim Joslin — owner of United Cigar Agency, which carries tobacco, magazines and fishing and hunting equipment. The shop has been on Pacific Avenue for 60 years, in its present location for about 15. With its peeling beige ceiling paint, scuffed linoleum, aroma of rich tobaccos, and deer heads on the walls, it's probably the least flashy shop on the mall.

Joslin thinks the glitz is not especially particular to the downtown shopping area, but reflective of a trend happening across the country.

Whatever is in style, he says, eventually will show up on the mall. "If it were 1970 and pizza were the big thing, it would be pizza and not glitzy."

While some longtimers welcome glitz as a shot in the arm for business, Joslin's not so happy with it. "I look at this like Presley. The Beatles. But this trend seems so much more detrimental, harmful, less humane, hard, violent, no respect. So, from that standpoint, I will be glad when it changes."

As he grew up hanging about his father's cigar store, he watched the evolution of Pacific Avenue. Trends, he notes, disappear then reappear a few years down the road.

Chocolate shops are a good example, Joslin notes. A few years ago, Mac Farlane's candy shop couldn't make it. Now, there are two chocolate shops on the mall and another soon to open.

There's a lot of money to be made from the razzmatazz — neon flamingo light fixtures, a "melted snowman" under glass. And knickknacks, as they once were called. Items that look good and make you feel good. Faddish fashions — paper trousers, wristwatches without numbers, shoes of magenta plastic. Some are marked up 100 percent, says Joslin. How else could the stores have markdown sales of 70 and 80 percent? he asks.

He warns owners of these trendy shops: "If they are all good business people, when all this flash ends, they will change to whatever the next trend is. If they don't, they will go broke like the other guys did."

The trendy shops never will push out the services because there will always be a need for them by locals living near the mall, says Ken Krzywicki, owner for 11 years of Ken's Shoes, a retail shoe store and shoe repair shop where shoes have been repaired shoes for about 45 years.

"The immediate draw to people who live in downtown Santa Cruz is downtown Santa Cruz," adds Krzywicki.

"You can meet all your needs here. There are cleaners, shoe repair shops, hardware stores. I don't see less and less of that because the people are still here to serve."

Services die and are taken over by the profitable trendy shops usually because there is no one young and skilled to take over, he says. "You have that conflict. Young people want to get into computers, physics, microbiology."

Stan Williams, owner of Dell Williams Jewelers, is saying the same thing. "I think it's definitely a shopping area for the locals. There's nothing more central-

ly located. The Westside and Eastside are growing like mad. A lot of traditional buildings are downtown and I think they attract people. I talk to a lot of people who say shopping malls are boring ... You go from Eastridge to Northridge. They are all the same."

'I don't want the store to grow old with me. I've seen that happen to other stores. The owner grows old and so does his merchandise and the store dies.'

—Peter Schipper

Joslin echoes this thought. The glitz isn't being put in purely for the tourists, but for the locals who make up the majority of mall shoppers. "I definitely think it's for the local people. It's their buying habits. There aren't enough tourists to support all the glitzy shops."

Trends have come and gone in the 58 years Dell Williams has been on Pacific Avenue. Williams recalls when the street was dotted with creameries, where you could get a milkshake or malt or an ice cream cone. Then, after creameries, there were restaurants.

"I think they (the glitzy shops) are going to have a difficult time. I think they are temporary ... I think we're

going through a renaissance. These stores will go in and out, but eventually super stores will go in."

"Super stores" he defines as the fine leather goods store and a luggage shop soon to come to the mall.

Glitz is good for all the businesses on the mall because it pumps life into the economy. That's the word from Peter Schipper of Schipper-Dillon Inc., a clothing store that's been in the same location on Pacific Avenue for 37 years.

"They bring a sense of newness, excitement and change, and I see those as positive. They are occupying space that otherwise would be vacant. They are providing sales revenue, revenue for employees and tax revenue."

They also provide variety, attracting a different type of shopper to the area. "One of the strong points of the mall is its diversity, not even in its store mix, but in its people mix," says Schipper.

But, he admits, he wasn't so sure about the trendy shops when they first appeared. "When Lily's started, I was skeptical. But I have to give her credit. She has a finger on what's happening ... The key to her success is diversity within the parameters of the market range. And that's what I'm striving for. That's the secret — address your market and then stay true to it."

The trendy shops, the longtimers say, will never replace their services and well-established retail shops — as long as they, too, keep an eye on the trends.

To stay alive, they say, you must change with the population and also have someone to take over the business when you get old and tired.

Schipper-Dillon wouldn't have lasted, Schipper said, if he hadn't been there to take over when his uncle retired from actively running the store. Schipper is keeping a close eye on changes taking place in the county and, because of them, is going to make a direction change.

No, Schipper-Dillon isn't going glitzy, but the emphasis will be changing from clothing for the mature man to clothing for the man in his 30s.

"I've done a demographic study and have found the average man (in this area) is 30, married, somewhat affluent. The market is changing and I'm trying to address this segment of the market and,



Stan Williams: Not just for wealthier, older customers.

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Photos by Dan Coyro

Kim Joslin: Whatever is the trend will show up on the mall.

at the same time, not sacrifice what we're known for."

"I don't want the store to grow old with me," Schipper adds. "I've seen that happen to other stores. The owner grows old and so does his merchandise and the store dies."

Williams also sees a market for the young and affluent. He gears his merchandise today to all ages, not just the older, wealthier customers. The young today, he says, have a real eye for quality.

Even a shoe repair shop must keep up with trends to stay in business. "I try to get into the trends because some trends become standard items," says Krzywicki. "I watch fashion trends. Even the materials used in repair are different than 10 years ago."

Joslin's market is the outdoorsy man or woman and he watches the trends in their tastes. "I used to carry cards, poker chips. Then, there wasn't much market, so I stopped. Now, there's a call again."

But you couldn't by any stretch of the imagination call a shop like United Cigar trendy. It's steeped in tradition, has the air about it of having stopped somewhere in time. Joslin knows most of his customers, greeting them by name. Many stop by just to relate the latest big fish story.

"If I made the store glitzy, it would be awful," he says. "But I'd still make money because I'd add all those things that go with it." He looks around the shop lovingly. "This isn't as good as the old one. The old one had oiled floors."

The rent tripled

"Larry Pearson's only been here for five years," says Ron Trinchero, who recently moved his store specializing in work boots, Harris Brothers, from the mall to a new location on Soquel Avenue. "The only reason Morris Abrams closed was that Hyman (Abrams) died and no one in the family wanted to run the business. Most of the old businesses are gone because the owners retired."

Harris Brothers was first established in 1894 as a clothing store. Trinchero has had the business for 10 years. He gained local notoriety for selling "Trollbuster" T-shirts, but he says he moved his business not because of the ubiquitous street citizens, but for a more prosaic reason — high rent.

"My rent tripled," he says. "I was just paying rent for the last six months. My volume wasn't high enough for me to be down there."

Trinchero has no bitter feelings about the mall, beyond saying "it's more of a boutique place now." He points out, however, that there has been a flight of so-called "hard goods" type of businesses away from Pacific Avenue. He cites the five shoe stores — Herold's, Alternative Footwear, Gallenkamp, Thomas Shoes For Men and his own business — that have either closed shop or moved off the mall. (Thomas shoe store, says owner Tom Jackson, is combining with his other mall store, Jackson's Shoes & Things.)

Trinchero isn't disturbed by the stark difference between his shop and the business that has replaced it — Camouflage.

"To each his own," Trinchero says. "Everything changes."

Edible underwear

The slogan which Camouflage chooses to commercially identify itself is: "Feel the excitement." What began as a T-shirt shop, selling "Santa Cruz" shirts to mainly tourists, has become something different, something truly mall-outrageous, with lines of edible underwear, G-strings with artful elephants, glitter, lotions and body oils, vibrators and sex-novelty items, neon drinking glasses, and T-shirts, rows and rows of T-shirts, the more outrageous silk-screened slogans on them the better.

"Life is hard, then you die," is the top seller. "No more Mr. Nice Guy — down on your knees, bitch" is another popular shirt slogan.

All this, and more, can be seen in the front display windows, which are the work of store manager Christine Damen. "T-shirts made Camouflage," she asserts. "The sexy stuff is the spice."

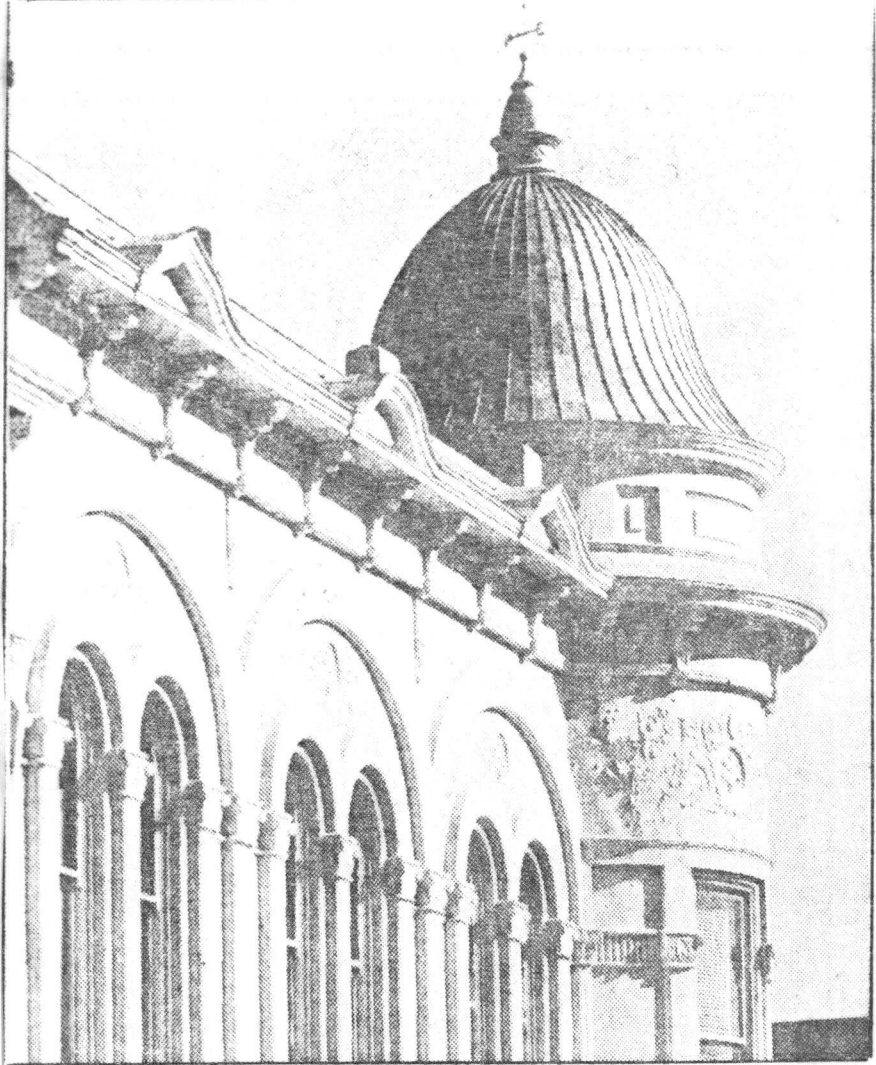
Camouflage was begun by owner Joan Levine and her former husband strictly as a T-shirt shop. The store moved from

its upper-floor Cooperhouse location — the rents Damen says was too high, plus the Cooperhouse demanded a percentage of sales — to the old Harris Brothers domicile last fall. Damen says business is up 50 percent since the move.

The store is working with a Bay Area-based consultant group to stay ahead of the market. Employees are all on commission and get extensive training in assessing customer's needs.

And desires. "The real sexy stuff, like the vibrators, is not moving so well in this location," Damen claims. She plans to phase out the blatant sex items, but to continue to sell "lighter items" such as oils, edible underwear and the like.

"A store has got to change constantly," says Damen. "I see some stores on the mall lagging behind. People come into a store for the image. They want



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Cooper Street architecture: a cupola of Renaissance Revival, 1894.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

C.C. Bailey and Laura Malaspina exchange greetings on the mall.

sensory experiences. They watch TV at home and see all these hot-shot commercials.

"Local people have changed," Damen went on. "They want this kind of thing. When you want something outrageous — do you go to the Capitola Mall?"

So where does she shop? Damen laughs. "I'm 42. It's too young for me here. I've found myself for the last few years going over the hill to Macy's. Now I'm going to Wilkes Bashford in San Francisco."

"Santa Cruz is not big enough to support that kind of thing. In some ways, this is a novelty mall."

Fond memories

It was once the Horseman's Shop, and before that the location was part of Santa Cruz Hardware. Now Fun City occupies the space. The owner of the building, Bob Wenzel of Clayton (near Concord), is undisturbed by the change.

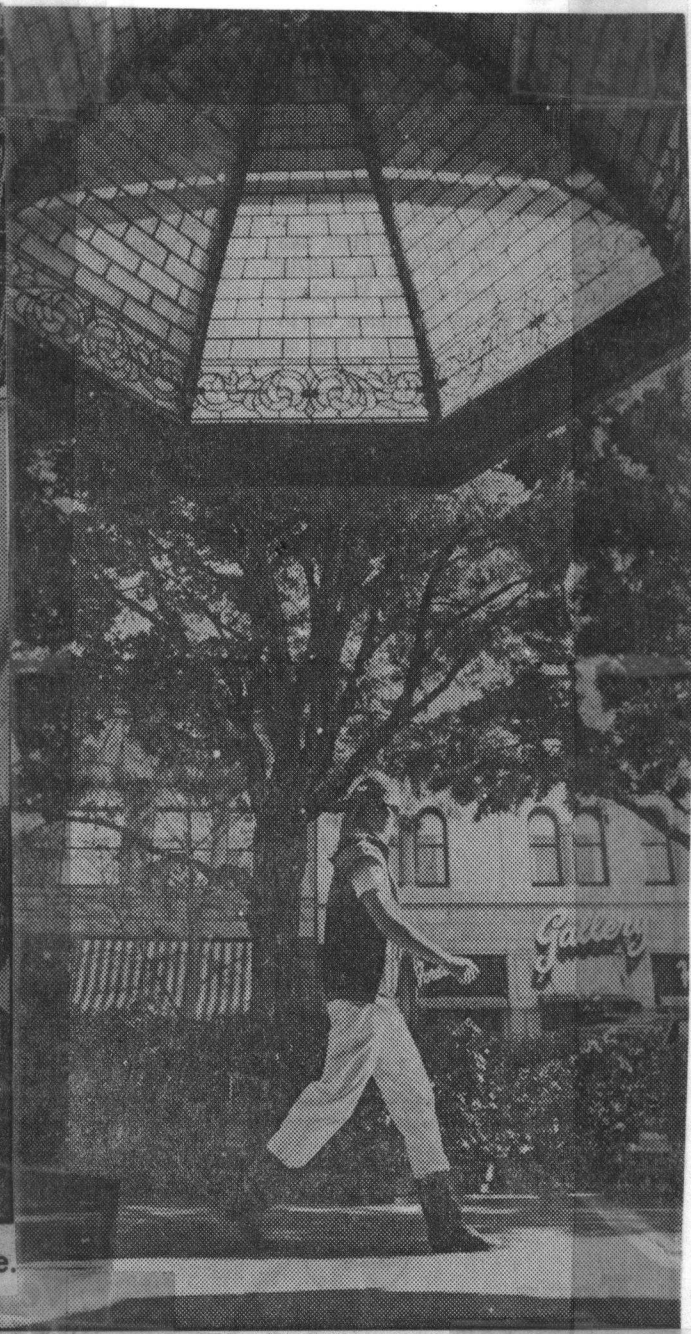
"Fun City is modern and trendy," Wenzel says. "It's a drastic change, a totally different departure. I have fond memories of the old store, but things do change."

Wenzel, though he hasn't lived locally for some years, speaks from a unique vantage point. His father, Ken Wenzel, ran the Horseman's Shop (the Wenzel family owned the business and the building) and was a co-founder of Santa Cruz Hardware next door.

REFERENCE

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Lily Wong's rainwear draws comment from oldtimer Al Newlove.

Ken Wenzel had another Pacific Avenue distinction — he was chairman of the study that led to the creation of the PGM.

Santa Cruz Hardware was founded by Jack Martin and Ken Wenzel in 1946. The Horseman's Shop was opened by Ken and Bob as a "subdivision" of the hardware store in 1964. The business grew, eventually taking over the entire building.

In 1980, when Ken's health began to decline, the business was sold. The new owner deemphasized the saddle business and added clothing lines, but it didn't work.

The new business failed in the spring of 1983, and a few months later, Fun City moved in.

"If it wasn't for my dad and Chuck Abbott, there wouldn't be a mall," Bob proclaims. "My dad was very proud of the mall. He felt downtown would have failed without it."

A more perfect mall

Fun, fun, fun — from the front end of a pink Cadillac that greets browsers to the slightly risqué greeting cards, past the neon and the bright prints and the furniture, beyond the lip-shaped telephones, to the stuffed animals that are as close as anybody's going to get to horses, Fun City is one store that's determined to be on top of whatever wave is cresting.

Owner George Simmons says, "We want to be different, not duplicate what's already here." Simmons has been a mall merchant since 1976, when he started Rainbow's End in the Cooper House.

"I hope the Cooper House gets it together again, gets rejuvenated," he adds. "It used to be more of a hub of things. So many of us on the mall live here, but the owners there don't live here, don't breathe the air like we do."

Simmons, who says 80 percent of his business is local, has given some thought to where he'd like to see the mall go. "If the mall is going to be successful, we have to go the way we're going. Take Union Street in San Francisco — we should do more of that look, rather than 41st Avenue.

"Walk down this mall on a spring day — you'll see jugglers, musicians, color, it's got a certain beat to it — where else can you go on the Coast and see all that?"

So who shops here? Working people?

"God, I think so," Simmons replies. "But our average shopper who comes downtown is a lot more keen to something different than if he lived in San Jose. That's one reason people live here."

Fun City, says Simmons, reflects its owner's bias. "We won't go out and buy a bunch of stuff that says 'Santa Cruz' on it. I won't do it. I want to see the same faces in here over and over."

Simmons even holds a vision of the future, a more perfect mall if you will. "I wish," he muses, "we had a real good men's store. There are guys, ages 30-50, in this town who probably are willing to spend money to get outfitted."

The thought appears to intrigue him. Ch-ch-changes. Survival of the fittest.

Blend of the new with the old adds to the color.

Photos by Dan Coyro



Merchandising is fun, fun, fun.