

Jerry's Sports says goodbye

After 36 years, owner Jerry Malmin retires; landmark building for lease

By Jondi Gumz

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SANTA CRUZ » After 36 years in business, Jerry's Sports has closed on the Eastside, to the dismay of local residents.

"They closed?! That was my childhood go-to for sporting gear," said Brett Turner of Scotts Valley in a tweet from the University of Arizona, where he is a

freshman.

"They donated shoes and all sorts of equipment to the school over the years," said Erik Redding, athletic director at Santa Cruz High School for 13 years. "They've been a staple for us if we needed something. That's going to be missed."

When Jeff Gabrio needed a gift for volleyball-playing clients to celebrate their home loan closing, he went looking for a volleyball at Jerry's Sports.

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"People like him, so they went there to shop," said Gabrio, who has known the owner since their high school days 50 years ago.

"Jerry is surely a Santa Cruz icon," said Sandi Spanfelner of Felton, praising his generosity, warmth and modesty and his employees were "eager to help. This is what makes shopping locally valuable."

Owner Jerry Malmin, who

turned 65 in August, and his wife Joanne, who worked at the store, were not available Monday, but Spanfelner said they were ready to retire.

Their son Troy Malmin, sweeping up at the shuttered store Monday, said he did not have time to talk because he had an appointment with landlord Howard Eddy.

The batting cages are for sale, according to a sign posted outside.

The shutdown came two months after Paradigm Sport

opened a gym with batting cages in the Harvey West area and as Sports Authority, a national chain, readies a location across from Gateway Plaza on River Street.

In 2009, after Santa Cruz Harley-Davidson closed, Jerry's Sports took over the 13,000-square-foot building with a prominent clock tower at 1148 Soquel Ave., sharing the space with Vanguard Realtors.

New signs designed by Steve Hosmer of Stokes Signs went up

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with funding from a redevelopment facade improvement grant.

The building, which has a large parking lot in the back, is at the intersection with Seabright Avenue, across from Ace Hardware and the Rio Theatre.

Malmin racked up athletic distinctions at Santa Cruz High and Cabrillo College then worked in the sporting goods field for 13 years before going into business for himself, according to Sentinel files.

His first store was 1,700 square feet at 1222 Soquel Ave.

He did well and moved to 5,000 square feet at 1126 Soquel Ave.

Disaster struck in 2002 after 16 years at that location.

A fire that started in a storage room waste basket destroyed the building as then-manager Doug Lindstrom was negotiating to buy the business.

Malmin ordered new merchandise and moved into the former Indian Motorcycle shop at 7000 Soquel Ave. At the time, he said he planned to stay in business for at least a few more years.

Bonnie Coben of Capitola made a special trip Monday to Jerry's Sports to buy tennis shoes and walked away disappointed.

Business broker Rex Walters was going to take advantage of the batting cages when he learned Jerry's closed.

"It's very sad," he said. "Sometimes a long-established business can experience a dip in sales and feel like it's a trend. What they don't realize is new young blood can come in and make a tremendous difference in the business."

Since Jan. 1, loans to buy a business have been easier to get, he said, adding that Santa Cruz County Bank is receptive.

In February, the locally owned Capitola Book Cafe closed after 34 years, facing competition from online retailer Amazon and e-books.

In July, Noelle Klein,

owner of Pretty Mama for 41 years, announced a going-out-of-business sale at the women's fashion shop in Capitola.

Sheryl Guidera, for 25 years owner of Kaleidoscope, the educational toy store in Capitola, has been looking for a buyer.

"No one wants to buy," said Elizabeth Hibbard, who works at Hart's Fabric. "It's cheaper online. It's sad."

With Jerry's gone, "we'll order online," said Redding, the Santa Cruz High athletic director. "We always have distributors calling us."

He observed, "Small business is getting pushed by big business ... Sometimes it's hard to compete."