

Leibbrandt And Puget

The 'Good Guys' Close Up Shop

BY DON RIGHETTI
Sentinel Staff Writer

Talk to a lot of people about what built the Leibbrandt and Puget clothing business and allowed it to prosper for 28 years, and they'll tell you it was camaraderie and fair dealing.

Not Leibbrandt and Puget.

They say it was sports.

The two were both members of sports teams themselves and have continued to be vitally interested and local sports activities.

They say that one of the reasons their business made it so long is that groups of men would gather in the store for day-long bull sessions after every game. And in the lengthy process of reliving every tiny part of the contest, maybe one or two members of the long-winded group would buy a shirt or a handkerchief.

The clothing store, at 1216 Pacific Ave., will close out its 28 years today.

Henry Leibbrandt, 64, will retire and spend a lot of time fishing and traveling. Bill Puget, 53, said he will seek part-time employment in a clothing store and maybe at the golf course at DeLaveaga so he won't be too far from sports.

They've been here a while.

Leibbrandt is a native and lifelong resident of Santa Cruz. Puget was born just a few miles

away, in Monterey, but has lived here since he was about 8.

Leibbrandt graduated from Santa Cruz High School in 1930. Puget went to the same school, but quit when he was a sophomore because the Great Depression was whittling the incomes of even sports enthusiasts.

The two met before World War II, through sports, naturally.

Leibbrandt was manager of the old Knights of Columbus basketball team in the city league, and Puget played against him for the White's (Mortuary) Cardinals.

And that was how they got together. They got even closer because Leibbrandt has six sisters and Puget married one.

Attorney Frank Murphy Sr. had married another one, and he suggested that his two basketball addict brothers-in-law start a clothing store.

It sounded good to them. Particularly to Puget, who had been working at the Matt Maciel clothing store on Pacific Avenue, and the store had just closed down.

Dick Shippey of Fresno, also married to one segment of the Leibbrandt Sisters throng, was invited into the business because he worked for Roos Bros. and knew how to operate

a clothing store.

But Leibbrandt and Puget bought him out in the fifth year of their operation, maybe because he wasn't a Santa Cruzan, or maybe he wasn't a big enough sports nut.

Leibbrandt and Puget were involved in the sponsorship and operation of the Santa Cruz Little League in the early 50s. And that helped lead to one aspect of the business that Puget enjoys particularly: the youthful age of the customers they have had over the years.

Some of the Little Leaguers started with them when they still played baseball and have continued to buy Leibbrandt and Puget clothing exclusively ever since.

Little Leaguer or not, The Sentinel has talked to some L&P customers who claim they have been buying their clothes there since they were children, and never have bought any anywhere else.

Asked about some of the memorable events that may have happened over the years, Leibbrandt slyly feigned that his memory had to be jogged by Puget in order to recall a young

lady who had come into the store to order underwear.

Unbeknownst to Leibbrandt, she had been hired by Puget and some other store employees to put on an act.

So when the young lady came into the store and said she wanted to buy some underwear, Leibbrandt was listening intently to her request when the girl pulled a secret catch on her robe and it fell to the floor. Leaving her standing there without a stitch on.

"His head rolled back and he said, 'Oh, my God,'" Puget sniggered.

Whereas Leibbrandt remembers ruefully, "When she asked for the underwear, I wanted to go up and put a tape around her waist to get the proper size, but my wife was in the office, and I was afraid to do it."

She wasn't the only young lady to come in the store and take her clothes off. And the other one was for real; she hadn't been hired.

Leibbrandt and Puget recalled that the lady in question marched into the store one day and said she'd like to use a dressing room.

They pointed one out to her. She went in, then emerged a few minutes later in a swim suit with her street clothes folded over her arm.

"Then she walked straight outside, got in her car and went to the beach," Puget said, shaking his head slowly from side to side.

The sports games that were rehashed the following day in such minute detail at the store ranged from local games to the major professional ones, the two recalled.

Since Puget played for the Seahawks, the former local semi-professional football team, there were lots of those games to relive, too.

Leibbrandt, for his part, is recalled by at least one local sports enthusiast as "one of the best basketball players ever to come out of Santa Cruz High School and he went on to be a star for San Jose State."

So he did. Leibbrandt was named captain of the team during his junior year at San Jose State University, and that was the year the squad won the Far West Conference cham-



Bill Puget, left, and Hank Leibbrandt, were wearing double-breasted wide lapel suits that have come and gone and come again since they opened shop on Pacific Avenue in 1947. Today, the two are closing shop. Through the years,

they have been generally known as "good guys" in the local area. Their store for years has been the local meeting place for sports buffs to talk over the big plays of recent athletic events.

pionship title.

Since the two enjoyed their business, and each other's company, so thoroughly, the end of the store does not come without

some minor regrets.

"We'd like to thank the customers who have been trading with us for all these years," Puget said, adding that

one of the most distasteful aspects of going out of business is the remarks "by those who were so loyal to us that they say they hate to see us closing."

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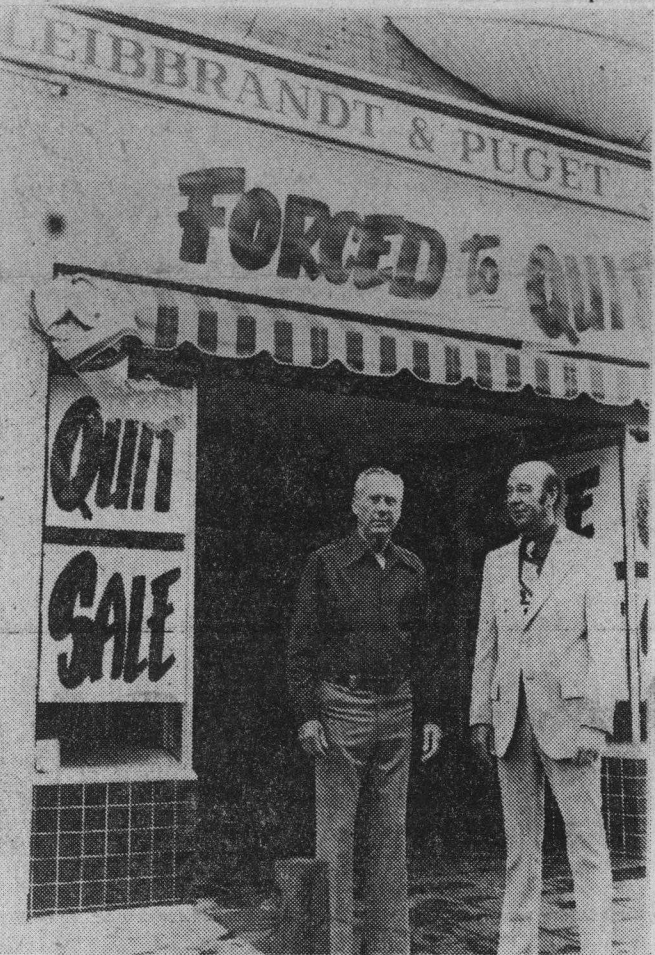
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The retirement of true greats, like Joe Louis and Joe DiMaggio, always brings a tear to the eye of the sports world. So it should get its hanky out again, because Henry Leibbrandt, left, and Bill Puget are retiring today. And while the folks in Poughkeepsie might know about the Brown Bomber and Joltin' Joe while they never have hear of Leibbrandt and Puget, the two were as big as their more famous comrades in the local sporting world. And they claim that the popular clothing business they operated for 28 years on Pacific Avenue was built on sports.



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