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Lily's, Red Wing Optical stick with downtown

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They're both downtown mainstays in their own way.

Lily's Coffee House and Flowers opened in 1998 in a 1,400-square-foot storefront at 419 W. Third St. It was a new concept at the time: a gourmet coffee shop located in a downtown known more for its service-oriented businesses.

Next door, at 417 W. Third St., was an optical house that had been serving customers since 1944. Red Wing Optical owner Dale Hoium leased the building from the Lantz family before moving his business around the corner to his own building at 321 Bush St.

That left the storefront next to Lily's vacant. Then the building went up for sale — and Lily's owners Brian Schneider and Tom Quanrud decided to buy it in January. "Lily's obviously needed to grow. When the building came up for sale it was a no-brainer," Schneider said. They knocked down the wall and doubled the size of the coffee house to 2,800 square feet.

Hoium opened in his new location in November, and Lily's reopened in June.

Now as the summer season peaks, the owners of both businesses have no regrets for remaining downtown — despite an ongoing debate among business owners about the long-term effects of the city's rapidly growing commercial district along Tyler Road.

"Daytime Red Wing has changed a lot

since we moved here five years ago," Quanrud said. "Downtown is on that cusp of evolving into an all-day thing with more offerings."

That's largely the reason Hoium chose to relocate to a larger space downtown than elsewhere, despite traditionally higher costs to run a business downtown.

"Downtown is a shopping center. It's just a whole group of little shops," Hoium said. "We've seen the demise of so many downtowns."

Yet Red Wing's downtown has few vacancies and is diversifying, despite increased competition. "People still have a good core to shop in," Hoium said.

More than anything, all three men agreed, the personal service keeps customers.

"We had the fortunate situation of having people come to our door from the beginning," Quanrud said. He and Schneider have realized their dream of operating a coffee shop/flower shop, despite the competition of more coffee shops.

Hoium has been dealing with competition since he bought his business in 1983. He's also been investing in downtown since then.



Dale Hoium moved Red Wing Optical to 321 Bush St. — staff photo by Erika Hahn

When Wilson Hardware went out of business 12 years ago, Hoium bought its buildings at 317 and 321 Bush Street. His daughter opened a lingerie business, Expressions, at 321 Bush St., Hallstrom & Son Florists opened a shop next door, and Hoium later bought a tanning shop and relocated it to Expressions.

When it came time to expand his optical shop, he knew he'd stay downtown. "There was no way I wanted to move it out to a strip," he said. He wanted to remain close to the majority of his customers, who live in Jordan Towers and Seminary Plaza.

Traffic has not posed a problem. Hoium said the turnover is higher on Bush Street, allowing his customers to come and go easily. At Lily's it's become a familiar comfort,



Lily's owners Brian Schneider and Tom Quanrud expanded their coffeehouse. — staff photo by Colin Beltz

something Schneider and Quanrud have learned to love about downtown.

They wanted to preserve that character when they bought their second building at 329 Main St. and opened Petunia's Espresso Shop. "There's plenty of business for everyone. You just have to find your niche," Quanrud said.

The Lily's expansion consisted of an increased greeting card line, new windows and new flooring. "We wanted to maintain the integrity of the building and its down-

town purpose," Quanrud explained. He and Schneider also wanted to keep the coffee house the familiar gathering place it has become in the last five years.

"Lily's has our own Norm and Cliff and a couple Dianes," Schneider said, referring to the characters in former "Cheers" TV program. "But it took a while for all of them to evolve over five years."

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