

Published: 05.12.2007

Bargain hunting

Grant Road shop closings reflect a host of negatives

By Christie Smythe

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

A decade ago, as many as 25 antique stores lined East Grant Road, longtime shop owner Judy Swanson recalled.

But in the not-too-distant future, only a handful will remain.

Of the dozen or so antique shops that currently populate the strip, several are planning to close in the coming months. The earliest, Swanson's Arizona Antiques, 3728 E. Grant Road, is shutting down Tuesday.

A planned widening of Grant Road has been one factor weighing on the minds of the store owners. But some say the biggest reason for leaving is that the rise of eBay and a proliferation of local antique fairs have made the market too competitive. Demand for centuries-old armoires and chandeliers is also not what it used to be, they said.

"I'm tired of going in the wrong direction," said Swanson, 58, who has owned Arizona Antiques for 13 years. The store hasn't made a profit in four years, she said.

"The younger generation is not into history like we were," she said. Gesturing to a case of pocket watches, she added: "A lot of this stuff, the market just went away."

Dwight and Christy Schannep, owners of the American Antique Mall at 3130 E. Grant, said cheap reproductions are killing the market for their dealers' wares, which include a range of furniture and other goods, such as vintage dishes and linens. After 14 years, the mall is closing June 30.

"You can get the old look with all of the conveniences of new," said Dwight Schannep. Buyers "don't care that it's particleboard and veneer."

Some of the store owners say they are simply tired of trying to stave off losses in sales, dealing with theft and handling other headaches. The added complication of the Grant Road widening project, expected to begin in about four or five years, is giving them just one more reason to close up shop, they said.

"It's just like the perfect storm on Grant Road," said Daryl Lewis, owner of Anything Goes at 4122 E. Grant Road. Lewis is planning to close the store after he finds a buyer or a new business to lease his property.

County antique fairs cited

Of all their frustrations, several of the shop owners said that local antique fairs, organized by the Pima County Parks and Recreation Department, have caused the most pain to their businesses.

In 1998, the county began holding monthly fairs at the Lew Sorensen Center, at 11150 E. Tanque Verde Road. This year, five more fairs were started at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park, 3482 E. River Road, according to recreation program coordinator Pat Tuttle.

Tuttle said the fairs are overall good for business in Tucson because they draw many out-of-state antique shoppers who likely also eat in local restaurants and stay in hotels.

She added that the fairs are also attracting fewer dealers than in the past. The busiest fairs once drew as many as 120 dealers, but now the fairs top out at around 90, she said.

But the shop owners say they don't like having to battle competition aided by their own local government.

"If you were sitting here paying property taxes to an entity competing with you ... and not making money, would you stay in business?" Lewis said.

Some stores thriving

Calling it quits

Business Address Closing date

Arizona Antiques 3728 E. Grant Road May 15

American Antique Mall 3130 E. Grant Road June 30

Tom's Fine Furniture and Collectibles 3402 E. Grant Road Around July 1

ABC Collectibles and Furniture 4034 E. Grant Road TBA*

Anything Goes 4122 E. Grant Road TBA

*To be announced

Source: Store owners

But elsewhere in the city and in a few other places along Grant Road, some other antique stores aren't struggling.

Although Tom Ward is closing his Tom's Fine Furniture and Collectibles store at 3402 E. Grant Road sometime around July 1, his 20,000-square-foot store at Pima Street and Craycroft Road is doing well. The only problem with the Grant Road store is that it is too close to his other location, he said.

"I'm competing with myself," he said.

Tumbling Tumbleweed, just off Grant at 2319 N. Country Club Road, is also attracting plenty of customers, said Karen Grimm, who owns the shop with her sister Ellen Haskell. Grimm, who previously owned antique shops in California, said the store's success results partly from her ability to stay on top of trends. Her purchases are often guided by home-decor magazines, she said.

"Our situation is great," Grimm said. "I don't understand why people are going out of business."

Some antiques shoppers say they will miss the stores closing along Grant.

"I think it's sad the market hasn't stayed up," said 53-year-old Daphne Myers, a pharmacy technician who was browsing in Arizona Antiques on Thursday. "If I could afford it, I'd have antiques all through my house."

Calling it quits

Business Address Closing date

Arizona Antiques 3728 E. Grant Road May 15

American Antique Mall 3130 E. Grant Road June 30

Tom's Fine Furniture and Collectibles 3402 E. Grant Road Around July 1

ABC Collectibles and Furniture 4034 E. Grant Road TBA*

Anything Goes 4122 E. Grant Road TBA

*To be announced

Source: Store owners

● *Contact reporter Christie Smythe at 434-4083 or csmythe@azstarnet.com.*

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.