

Search

Site Web Archives - back to 1987 Google Newspaper Archive - back to 1901 powered by Google

St. Petersburg
Times

News | Citrus

Print Email story Comment Email editor

Subscribe to the Times

The cobbler on the square

In an Inverness shop, worn heels are welcomed by a craftsman who wishes we didn't throw shoes away.

By DAWN REISS
Published August 8, 2006



[Times photos: Will Vragovic]

John Millard works on a pair of sandals for a customer at one of the sewing machines in his shop. "This guy wanted the backs cut out of his sandals, so I've got to doctor them up as best as possible," Millard said.

INVERNESS - John Millard's hands move quickly as he shapes a leather heel. He rotates the leather, his arms gliding in half circles as he carefully works through his latest repair.

Being here in the back room of John's Shoe Repair is like walking back in time to a day when the local cobbler was a fixture.

But people don't repair shoes anymore. They buy new ones instead. They don't wear wingtips or high-heeled pumps like they used to - in short, they don't always need craftsmen like John Millard.

He jokes that if someone walked in the door today and offered to buy his business, he would sell it.

He knows that probably won't happen.

"There isn't enough money in it," he said. "It's just too hard of a living, that's why you don't find shoe repair places like you used to. It isn't for lack of shoes, it's a lack of quality. We've gotten into a mode of throwing things away."



Millard uses a pair of pliers to pull nails out of the heel of a man's dress shoe.

Inside the shop, supplies overflow. There are stitchers, finishers and Singer sewing machines, shelves of shoe polish and spools of bright thread.

Zipper hang on the wall near rolls of dyed Lizard leather, vinyl and Birkenstock soling. A gleaming white New Balance shoe is drying with a new 2-inch orthopedic lift and a Dooney &

Citrus

- Crystal River mayor seeks re-election
- Death is all in a day's work
- Family's pet bull attacks owner
- The cobbler on the square
- New Port Richey business provides familiar link
- Panthers going solo for now on the greens
- Worth their weight in water

Special report

- Last mission to repair the Hubble telescope
Hubble space telescope discoveries have enriched our understanding of the cosmos. In this special report, you will see facts about the Hubble space telescope, discoveries it has made and what the last mission's goals are.
- More special reports

Video report

- For their own good
Fifty years ago, they were screwed-up kids sent to the Florida School for Boys to be straightened out. But now they are screwed-up men, scarred by the whippings they endured. Read the story and see a video and portrait gallery.
- More video reports

Multimedia report

- Rays fan guide to the Trop
Here are some insider tips to Tropicana Field and area information.

Click here for daily delivery of the St. Petersburg Times.

Email Newsletters

Be the first to know. Register for free breaking news alerts and morning headlines.

ADVERTISEMENT



[More multimedia reports](#)

Burke black purse needs its strap fixed, like a few suitcases on the floor.

There are stacks of shoes, laceup black boots, belts, purses and directions on how to charge for refinishing a saddle.

"I keep a messy place," he said, "but I know where everything is at."

Black-and-white photographs from the early 1900s hang on the wall. It is his way of memorializing the Gundacker family who built this business so many years ago in Iowa.

Born in Iowa, he came to Florida after serving in the Air Force in Vietnam. He moving to Ruskin to work as a pipefitter on the railroad. When he went back to Iowa to see his high school sweetheart, Linda, who was getting a divorce, he made her his wife.

They stayed in Florida for five years before moving back to Iowa to raise their children.

In 1979, Millard and his wife saw a clothing and shoe store for sale that also had a shoe repair business. They had never repaired shoes before, but bought it anyway.

"I had to lie a lot until I learned how to do it," Millard said.

After 12 years in Iowa, Millard sold the retail portion of the company in Iowa and moved the shoe repair business and the family to Florida, ending up near Cocoa Beach.

In 2004, Millard moved the shoe repair machines to Inverness and opened a new shop on Courthouse Square.

It's not easy, running a throwback kind of business, but Millard is sticking with it.

"I don't see a lot of people hiring 60-year-olds," Millard said. "Although it irritates me sometimes, with some of the things I have to work on, I like working with my hands."

Dawn Reiss can be reached at 352 860-7303 or dreiss@sptimes.com.

[Last modified August 8, 2006, 05:42:42]

Share your thoughts on this story

[Read our guidelines for comments](#)

First Name (only)

Location

Comment (May be published online and/or in print)

You have 250 characters left to comment.

Comments on this article

FIELD & STREAM
 Since 1871
 CLOTHING
 WEAR YOUR PASSION EVERYDAY

Field & Stream Brand Clothing
 New Line Fall 09/10

09-10 FALL COLLECTION
 # SHOP NOW

Wear Your Passion Everyday.
www.fieldandstreambrand.com



© 2009 · All Rights Reserved · St. Petersburg Times
 490 First Avenue South · St. Petersburg, FL 33701 · 727-893-8111
[Contact Us](#) | [Join Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe to the St. Petersburg Times](#) | [RSS](#)
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Standard of Accuracy](#) | [Terms, Conditions & Copyright](#)