



Kelly Presnell / Staff

Steve Perri replaces a watch battery at his Perri Jewelers. Customers have persuaded him not to close the family business, a Downtown fixture.

Perri Jewelers is going right around corner

By Becky Pallack

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A new generation is moving a longtime Downtown family business, trying to keep the legacy alive just around the corner from its roots. A member of the Perri family has run Perri Jewelers in Downtown Tucson for nearly 60 years. Now, Steve Perri, 36, is taking over for his father. Simon Perri, 77, who had a stroke in September that left him unable to do engraving work. Steve Perri originally planned to close the store, at 37 W. Congress St. He took a semester off from teaching literature and coaching baseball at Salpointe Catholic High School and started cleaning out the store. But talking with customers about his family's business changed his mind. "I just couldn't let that go," Perri said. "I don't know if it's going to work, but I have to give it a try."

He'll open in a smaller space at 13 N. Stone Ave. on June 10. Perri always has juggled two careers. For 15 years, he has repaired jewelry at the store each morning before beginning his full-time teaching job. Now, he'll manage the store after school hours while a clerk minds the shop during the day. He is downsizing the business to balance both the store and his teaching career, and he'll limit his coaching time. The family store was first located where the Pima County Administration Building is now, 130 W. Congress. Since 1957, it has been owned by Simon Perri, who took over the business from his brother. Simon Perri moved to the current location, on the same block as the Fox Theatre, in 1963.

Signs at the store now advertise Perri Jewelers' new location just around the corner. "I didn't want to leave the block," Perri said. "We are a Downtown business. We provide a service for the business community. They know us; they trust us." Customer Anastrid Molina remembers her father-in-law and husband shopping at Perri Jewelers for years. Now, everybody in the family buys there because the Perris are so nice, she said. New customers, too, come back because of the service. Steve Parsons, a customer who works Downtown, came back to the store Wednesday for a watchband because Perri recently resized and cleaned his rings for free.

Caffe Milano owner Carlo Borella will expand into the old store on Congress after a summer break. While it is exciting to expand and start making gelato in Tucson, Borella said he misses Simon, who spoke to him in Italian every day since the cafe opened five years ago. Even before his stroke, Simon Perri had planned to retire soon because the store needed more than \$20,000 in improvements, his son said. Steve Perri worked his first job at the family store, cleaning the floors and windows. "I grew up here," Perri said. He was 19 and a student at the University of Arizona when he decided to pick up the family trade from one of his father's jewelers. He learned engraving from his expert dad. He also learned about doing business the old-fashioned way. He recently found a box of filed cards that have no-interest credit notes for the store's best customers, he said. "It's become more than a business. These people have become my dad's friends," he said.

Not everything will change when the business moves. The original 1945 neon sign and a 1927 cash register will grace the new location. "It's great that they're relocating rather than closing entirely," said Donovan Durband, executive director of the Tucson Downtown Alliance.

° Contact reporter Becky Pallack at 573-4237 or bpallack@azstarnet.com.