

Antique Emporium will have new start, apartments added

After decades, Antique Emporium will close for renovations, restructuring

BY COLLEEN KING
THE OCEAN STAR

POINT PLEASANT BEACH — After a lifetime full of antiques, Clara Johnson is ready to move on to something — or, at least, someplace — new.

Mrs. Johnson, 69, owner of the Antique Emporium on the corner of Bay and Trenton avenues, is selling the business and building after working out of the grand structure for more than 40 years.

The Johnson family, which she married into by way of her husband, David, had previously operated a furniture business out of the store with another family, the Osbornes.

In 1970, the Johnsons bought the other family out of the building altogether and continued the furniture business until 1980, Mrs. Johnson said.

"The furniture business was slowing down, becoming different from what we had dealt with before," Mrs. Johnson said. "In 1980, we closed the furniture business and in 1981, on Memorial Day weekend, the antique store was open."

Mrs. Johnson said she barely had any time between closing the furniture business and opening the antique store.

Nonetheless, the new business venture thrived.

"With a month, we had enough dealers," Mrs. Johnson said of filling the space with independent dealers. "For many years, we were very full."

Antique dealers were able to rent out booths or cases depending on how much space they needed.

When the emporium first opened, only booths were available. Each dealer, in addition to paying rent on the booth, would have to work the floor for one day each week.

"Those dealers were the ones selling the merchandise for the other dealers," Mrs. Johnson said. "My job, as manager, is to make sure everything was accounted for properly and the dealers and everyone got paid the right amount. It's quite a larger chore than most people think it is ... to run a building and a business."

In the mid-1990s, Mrs. Johnson added display cases for dealers to rent out, as well. Those dealers who rented out the showcases were not responsible for working the floor and only had to pay rent on the case.

"Then we started losing dealers by attrition," Mrs. Johnson said, adding that when there were open spaces, she would fill them with her own antiques, which she also sells out of the building — something she is passionate about.

"Plus, my passion was not running the people as much as it was — it is — being an antique dealer," Mrs. Johnson said.

Mrs. Johnson has sold the building to Roman Barsky, of Princeton, and Vinnie Palmieri, of Brick, but they have not closed on the sale yet.

The plan is for all the dealers to have their items removed from the building by Sept. 30. Then, Mrs. Johnson has another month or so to get herself out.

Mr. Barsky and Mr.

Palmieri, while keeping the downstairs as a version of the Point Pleasant Antique Emporium, will be adding apartment units upstairs.

Mrs. Johnson said she will be holding a public auction on Oct. 19 and 20 for the remaining antiques and a few bigger ticket items that have not sold yet.

Still, leaving the business she has built up for 40 years is bittersweet.

The building, which dates back to 1901, when it was originally built as a hardware store, is special to Mrs. Johnson. But, she doesn't want to stick around and see her life's work taken apart and put back together.

"To see something I created turned into something different, I think, would be too painful," Mrs. Johnson said of why she sold the building and the business with no plans to stay involved in the emporium after it changes hands.

Once the building is renovated, a group of dealers who have banded together will move their antiques back in and showcase their items on the ground floor, with the rest of the building turned into new apartments, Mrs. Johnson explained.

The antique store will still be known as the Point Pleasant Antique Emporium.

"It's time," Mrs. Johnson said of her choice to leave. "I have grandchildren I don't get to see."

She said she hopes to move with her husband — who works as a broker — to be closer to her children and grandchildren, who live in Maine and California.

"Wherever I go, I'll have to reinvent myself, but I'll have the advantage of having



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The Point Pleasant Antique Emporium will be changing hands soon, with renovations and the addition of apartment units, but the outside is set to look much the same.

my husband with me," Mrs. Johnson said of her desire to stay in the antique business in some way, wherever her family ends up.

Mrs. Johnson said she was happy the new owners, while they plan to renovate the building entirely, are open to keeping an antique business in some form.

"Sometimes things have to change, but sometimes they don't have to be so drastic," Mrs. Johnson said.

Mr. Barsky said the downstairs will remain as the commercial space of the emporium, with 12 rental units built into the second and third floors of the building.

While the building must be closed for renovations, which will start in late November, Mr. Barsky said he is hopeful the emporium can be open by spring 2013.

"It's going to be nice — it's going to be beautiful," Mr. Barsky said of the plans for the building.

While the building will have a major renovation, keeping the character of the building is important.



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After 40 years as the owner, Clara Johnson sold the building and business of the Point Pleasant Antique Emporium.

The outside will look relatively the same, with everything repaired and painted using similar materials to what now stands.

Mr. Barsky said it was important to "keep the char-

acter, because it's a landmark in town."

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