

Family-run Hollywood Liquor Store changes hands

By Charity Prater

Since 1976, the Hollywood Liquor Store and Hollywood Mixer Shop has been a landmark in the Hollywood district.

Mark Karson bought the store, located at 3738 N.E. Sandy Blvd., from his father, Dan Karson, in 1976 and spent the following years running the business and making it a part of his family.

"My son, Travis Karson, has worked at the store, along with my daughter, grand-nephew, nephew and even my ex-wife," says Karson. "The store was a place for lifetime friends and family members."

Many of the store's regulars were surprised to learn the business was sold in March of this year to Dan Miner, who's looking forward to his new venture.

"It has been a positive experience for me," Miner says. "We have expanded on the spirit offerings, are planning a remodel in a little over a month (to make the store more shopper friendly) and we've started weekly spirit tastings on Thursdays. We're very excited about the word-of-mouth buzz around the community. People are curious as to what the new owners are up to. We have created a special section for Oregon and Northwest spirits."

Although the company is in good hands, Karson still gets emotional over the selling of his family's store. In 2000, however, when he

was diagnosed with cancer, he realized he would eventually have to sell the business. The cancer treatment made it difficult for him to stand, sit or walk for more than just a few minutes. He knew he would no longer be able to run the company.

"To this day I would have liked for my son to inherit the store," says Karson, "but there are a lot of politics in the liquor business, and I think it would be a burden on him."

Karson's son understands what it takes to run a liquor store in Oregon. According to Mark Karson, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission consistently debates with the State of Oregon and the rules governing the business are why Travis Karson decided to not take over the company.

For nearly 40 years, Mark Karson says, he's fought against what he considers strict liquor laws, which his company had to adhere to, and spent thousands of dollars attempting to change the system. Stocking, maintaining and running the store, he says, are the easier aspects of being in the liquor industry.

"I have filed lawsuits against the state and spent tons of time with the legislature to get simple problems within the laws mended," says Karson. "I was a thorn in their side."

As a boy, Karson attended Fernwood Elementary School and Grant High School.



Mark Karson (right), with an employee in the Hollywood Liquor Store, which Karson recently sold. - Courtesy Mark Karson

He regularly volunteers for the Portland Rose Festival and other community events. Over the years, he's seen three and four generations of the same family walk through the doors of his business. At his high-school reunions, Karson says, people would often ask him, "Do you still have the liquor store?"

"I've had some customers for so many years that they would report shoplifters to me, wait in the store if they saw someone being suspicious and know the names of my entire family," says Karson. "Owning a liquor store is not an easy business to run. I've always said that I do the best that I can to provide a legal product to my customers."

After years of managing a business that was handed down from father to son, Karson admits he regrets that his illness caused him to have to sell a business that had been in his family for so many years. Now that he's released ownership of the Hollywood Liquor Store, he had a few words for his old friends and valued customers.

"I'd been at that store for so long that I never thought that things would change," says Karson. "I want to say thank you to everyone who was there with me through the years and thank them for the good memories and friendships."