Gonty's ends 71 year era

Ed and Eleanor Gonty

Today the sign says "Gonty's Shoes." It won't be there much longer, so if you haven't seen it in the last 15 years, you'd better take a gander now.

After 71 years in the shoe business, Gonty's is selling out.

Jerry and Joyce Holloman, Heppner, have purchased the shoe business and will take over at the first of the year, calling it "The Shoe Box."

When Ed Gonty steps out the door of that building for the last time, he'll take with him an era, a history of Heppner that is probably paralleled only by Thomson Brothers grocery.

Gonty's has been the name of shoes in Heppner for the last 71 years, starting with a humble beginning in 1905. Since that time, the name has gone through two World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

In the early 1900s, Edmond F. and Edward N. Gonty came to the United States with their mother, a widow, who in later years married Charlie Groshens.

In 1905, as young men, the two brothers came to Heppner, one interested in shoe repair and one in taxidermy. The first business was where Reed's Mobil station (also changing hands at the new year) is located. At that time, the Frog saloon was next to Gonty's shop.

In 1917, the business was moved to the Masonic building where Morrow County Health officials are located now.

Edmond F. moved to Portland where he owned and operated a taxidermist shop, known as Gonty's Furs, until ill health, and the business was sold to Ed Hamilton.

In 1913, Edward N., still living in Heppner, married Ellen Marlatt. From this union, two sons were born. Little did Edward N. know that following his service to the community, his son would take over and manage the business for another 43 years.

The two sons were Edmond E. and Thomas L. The shoe repair and shoe store was moved in 1917 to the building where Lebush Shoppe is today.

Mr. and Mrs. Gonty operated the business until Mrs. Gonty moved away. Edmond E. or "Ed" as he is known to friends even today, helped his father and took over management in 1933. With his work for his father as a youth, Ed Gonty has built a career of over 50 years in the Heppner shoe business.

Ed's father passed away in 1940. Thomas finished high school and worked in various airplane factories. He married Fay Fuller from Fort Worth, has four girls and a boy and lives in Edmonds, Wash., where he works for Boeing.

Ed married Eleanor Hemrick, whose family had lived on the Allan Thom ranch in Sand Hollow and was farming in the Beaverton area at the time of her marriage.

Ed and Eleanor have three sons and a daughter. Raymond E. and his wife live in Seattle where he's a city police officer. Virginia and husband live in Ukiah with their two girls on a farm. Thomas lives at home and works for Kinzua. Doug is with the missile Sight Security in the Air Force, stationed at Grand Forks, N. Dakota.

Are the Gonty's actually retiring? Heavens, no! They are just devoting more time to a hobby of Ed's that has grown into a business. Ed will be in business, across the street from his home, in a new building in back of the shoe store. He'll be repairing and selling radios and radio related equipment.

This advertisement appeared in the Oct. 12, 1922 Heppner Gazette-Times

Eleanor? She'll have little trouble keeping busy, she says. Lots of work ahead to move out from under the feet of Hollomans.

Since that start in 1905, the Gonty shoe business has seen more than two thirds of a century pass before its doors.

During the war, rationing stamps helped pay for everything. Eleanor remembered the time when a man hurriedly came in the shop and grabbed a pair of shoes, handed her a number 17 shoe stamp and scurried out the door. "I don't even remember if he paid for them," she said, noting that he was only interested in spending that stamp before it expired.

What, no bubble gum at Gonty's? One lady, Eleanor remembers, was down right irritated at the shop personnel during the rationing periods. "If anybody has it," the lady bellered, "Gonty's would have it."

Ed was in the shoe repair business for awhile until he sold out to Bill Farra in 1945. Mrs. Farra still operates the shoe repair store on Main Street.

Ed, who said he sold his wife's mother a pair of shoes, mentioned a couple of unusual customers. He sold shoes to people from Spokane for four years in a row. They were traveling through on their way to visit in Burns.

For the last seven or eight years, Gonty has supplied a beauty shop operator in Baker with moccasins. His entire crew wears the leather shoe and Gonty has the corner on that market.

While the shoe store closes its doors on the Gonty name, Ed and Eleanor will continue to be active in the community. Their past achievements and service reads like a city's list of clubs.

Ed was president of of Parent Teachers, president of the Holy Name Men, president of Jaycees, a member of Civil Air Patrol, a member of Chamber of Commerce, member of the Elks' Club, president of the Rock Club and has served on the Heppner common council for many years.

Both are members of St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Eleanor was also president of Parent Teachers and president of the Altar Society. She has been president of Soroptimists Club, and a member of the First Hospital Auxiliary, Jaycee-ettes, a life member of Soroptimists, and secretary-treasurer of the Pioneer Picnic.

Both have served on other community projects, including service with the Cub and Boy Scouts.

So the name on the shoe store will come down. With it will pass a dynasty of Heppner history and service. The name will change, but Gonty won't be forgotten. He'll just be in the back, working on radios and keeping the same smiling face for visitors and patrons.

After 71 years, the Gonty name has seen styles change from lace up leathers to Three C work boots to Beatle boots to the Earth Shoe. It only seems appropriate that Ed Gonty should step out with his good foot, er shoe, forward. It's been a proud name that won't just disappear.

Solid Leather Shoes

Inside and outside, in every detail, our shoes are built for service and solid comfort.

Into each pair we put the maximum values at the least possible price—furnish you extra good shoes.

High in Quality, Low in Price

We challenge the shoe world on value and price, and stand squarely behind each sale with the strongest warrant of quality ever put behind good shoes.

Try Them and You Will Always Buy Them.

WE DO SHOE REPAIRING

Gonty Shoe Store

Main Street, Heppner, Ore.

BMCC toys with hike

Blue Mountain Community College is entertaining a plan to increase tuition and travel equalization allowance, but the board decision has been deferred until Jan. 19.

BMCC now pays five cents per mile for the distance from a student's home to the college, less 10 miles. The payment is made at the end of each term to residents of Morrow and Umatilla Counties, who complete the term with at least 12 credit hours.

Current payments range from $14 per term for students from Admas to $154 to students from Heppner. If the allowance is increased one cent per mile for the distance, the payment would rise from $14 to $16.80 for the Admas student and from $154 to $184.80 for the Heppner student.

by Billy Smith

Lexington Lumber Yard

Marty Brett

Gonty's Shoe Store

R & W Drive-In