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## Smith's still satisfying customers

By John T. Miller



Tucked in the rear row of businesses between two vacant office spaces and behind the Blue Ginko in the Lafayette Plaza, Madison Smith's shoe repair shop has been serving the Lamorinda area since 1981.

Advertising only in the phone book, Smith gets more than enough business from repeat customers and referrals to keep him busy six days a week. Some of his clients have been with him for decades. "Repeat customers are really the heart of my business," he says. Word of mouth brings in many more.

In addition to working on shoes, Smith will work on most any leather product, including purses, wallets and suitcases, for example. He's also been known to fix saddles.

Although Madison Smith and his son John Smith declined to be photographed for this article, you can find them behind the door of their quaint shoe repair shop in the Lafayette Plaza. Photo John T. Miller

Smith's father was a sawmill worker in Oroville, where he grew up. He says this is where he learned his shoe and leather trades.

He began his shoe repair business in Chico. The soft-spoken 90-year-old says, "It was so long ago, I can't even remember the year." Later he moved to Concord where he set up shop near the BART station on East Street in 1972. Redevelopment forced him out and he relocated to the Clocktower Building for 28 years before moving to his current Lafayette Plaza location.

Smith commutes from his Oakland home every day. As he enters his 10th decade, he says, "I might consider retirement if I could sell my business. It's tough to make a profit with the cost of rent and materials being so high."

He claims he has been able to do well in the business and "make a go of it," and he's been happy with the reception the Lamorinda community has given him.

Smith and his wife, Lori, have four sons and three daughters between them. Most of his children are scattered throughout the Bay Area, although his oldest son is in Texas and a daughter lives in Elk Grove. His wife is retired after a career working in the San Francisco schools.

His son John, who is retired after stints in many different careers, including the military, hospital work, and many other jobs, helps out part time in the shop. About his father, he says, "He's been working in this trade so long he can fix anything. Kind of a magician with leather!"

Multiple reviews on Yelp praise the work of Smith and his son and it's easy to see why they have so many repeat customers.

When Smith is not in his Lafayette shop, his interest is focused on the Primitive Baptist Church in Oakland, where he and his wife are valued church members. He has previously served as an elder with the congregation.

When you enter the shop you may be startled by the jangling bells on the door, but you'll be pleased by the wonderfully redolent smell of fine leather, in addition to finding personable and quality service.

Reach the reporter at: [john@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:john@lamorindaweekly.com)

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