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## Campana Music closing its doors

By John T. Miller



Joe Renwick, left, son of former manager Ben Renwick and an expert in instrument repair, poses with current manager John Kreis in front of what was once the largest inventory of sheet music in the Bay Area. On the wall behind them is a photo of founding owner Joe Campana. Photo John T. Miller

the shop for 26 years.

After Kreis lost his father when he was 17, Joe Campana took him in and became like a second father to him. "He was one of the best people I met in my life. Joe helped me through a rough time and then hired me when I was 20 years old."

Campana moved from Oakland and opened the store in 1947 across Mt. Diablo Boulevard. When it burned down, he built the store on its current location in 1968.

Kreis relates that for many years, Campana would get to work at 6 a.m., give lessons until the store opened at 9 o'clock, then after closing at 6 p.m. would give lessons until 10 p.m., six days a week.

"He showed me the ropes and I got my work ethic from him," says Kreis, bragging that he'd taken only two days of sick leave in his 28 years and very few vacation days, "which were unpaid."

At the height of its business, Campana Music gave lessons, music rentals, sales of musical instruments and accessories, repairs, and boasted the largest inventory of sheet music in the Bay Area. At one point they also sold TVs and VCRs. Up to 8-10 teachers worked in the eight studios.

Campana worked until the day before he passed away seven years ago. Ben Renwick, a talented baritone saxophone player who gave lessons at the studio, took over as manager. When he retired last October, Kreis then stepped into the role.

Another key employee is Ben's son, Joe Renwick, who had worked on and off at the store since he was 12 years old. When Ben Renwick took over, he talked his son into attending trade school in Red Wing, Minnesota, where he learned the art of instrument repair.

Like so many other small businesses, online competition is the main factor forcing them out. Kreis says, "We buy stuff for the price that online businesses can sell it for."

After giving so much of his adult life to Campana Music, Kreis plans on taking a few months off for a breather and then either go back into the music business or look into the wine industry, another interest of his.

Meanwhile, after repairing musical instruments for six years, Joe Renwick is finishing the electrical engineering program at Diablo Valley College and plans to transfer to a University of California school.

Studio L, which uses the upstairs portion of the building for music and performance instruction, will continue to do business there for now.

After 71 years doing business in Lafayette, Campana Music will be closing its doors for good later this month.

The last official day for the store will be Aug. 16, but it will host a celebration commemorating their seven decades of serving the area on Friday, Aug. 17, from 3 to 6 p.m. The store will also have one last blowout sale at that time.

The Campana family continues to own the building and the surrounding properties and is undecided about whether they will look for a new tenant or consider selling, according to current store manager John Kreis.

For Kreis, the closing will represent more than just the end of 28 years working for the Campanas. "Although I don't have the same last name, I look at them as family," he says. "I've known them since I was 3 years old."

Kreis's mother, Gretchen Givens, was an avid piano player and visited the store often. The two families became close, watching Raiders games together along with other activities. Givens gave piano lessons through

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