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The oldest jewelry store in the city today is said to be the O'Connor Jewellers located downtown just north of Bridge Street. Since it opened on June 17, 1955, the store was owned and managed by the late Gerry O'Connor, a man with a fondness for myriad and odd collection of clocks that drew generations of his customers to his tiny store.

"I remember there was this one clock which we sold about 25 years ago. It was called the Atmos clock. It had a steel cylinder at the back and every time the air pressure changes in the room that cylinder would expand and contract and that action worked the clock on a perpetual motion. It never needed to be wound and it did not need batteries either. It was very interesting," says O'Connor's son, John, who now runs the store, which remains at its original location today. That clock, he adds, was sold for \$1,200.

The younger O'Connor recalls his father's collection of antique pocket watches and talking clocks that charmed many customers by their ability to say the time in different languages such as English, Italian and French.

There were others that sounded like the acceleration of a Harley Davidson and yet others that sounded like a passing train.

The store's inventory of jewelry, clocks and watches was a combination of both new and old, he continues.

"The highest priced item that we have sold in this store was a pair of diamond

earrings with a carat on each side. It was brand new and sold for \$18,000," he says.

The store's founder passed away two and a half years ago. For over four decades he, a clockmaker by profession, had pulled his business through the decades in the face of stiff competition provided by other bigger and better known jewelry stores in the downtown area.

"When my father first opened his store, there were about six to seven jewelry stores around here. In fact, my father got a taste for the jewelry business from his employment at two of those stores. By the time he was ready to open his own business, he had collected quite a following of loyal

customers. He had no trouble getting his own business up and running briskly," says John, who began working at his father's business after school and on Saturdays since he was 14.

Add to this mix, the opening of Quinte Mall and the gradual entry of business on Bell Boulevard.

He continues, "Before Quinte Mall entered the scene we used to have customers heading to our store from communities up north. Families from Tweed, Marmora, Madoc and others used to often come shopping in the downtown area. Some customers would bring antique pieces that have been in their family for a long time and

sell them to my father. Over the years it became quite a collection."

He is quick to add that despite the competition the store still has old customers who remember his father's style of personal service and individual attention given to them.

"My father was well-liked. He was personable and had this wonderful sense of humour, which made people welcome at his store."

Musing about changes in the price of jewelry over the decades, John recalls that gold was only \$35 an ounce when he first started working at the store. Compare that to what he remembers as \$800 an ounce in the 1980s.

"My father had these school rings in the store. It was \$ 7.95 for a sterling silver school ring. Same ring today would be priced at \$125."

As an owner of a jewelry store, one of his father's greatest concern had to do with the store's security, John says. In the first few months of operation, the store was robbed of all its contents and he says it was a devastating experience for his father's new operation. Fortunately, all the contents were insured and he was saved financially.

Today, not much has changed inside the store, John says. It sells almost the same items with new additions such as natural gemstones and minerals that John is personally fond of collecting.

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