Just two months ago, while waiting for a flight at the Pearson Airport in Toronto Belleville resident Bill Yeotes had his shoes shined. It costed him $6, a far cry from the 25 cents his father used to charge his customers at his downtown business in Belleville years ago.

"Shoe shine services were prevalent everywhere way back then," recalled Yeotes. "People cared a lot about having their shoes polished and about appearances in general."

As a teenager, Yeotes used to work part-time on weekends at the Uptown Billiard Hall, 316 Front St., which was owned and operated by his late father, Jimmy Yeotes. And as he recalled, 'the Uptown' was a popular place where local men regularly gathered to play pool and hang out with their friends.

A Greek immigrant, his father had bought the business from the Maraskas family in the late '30s and had operated the business for decades before selling it to Peter Zamanis in the late '60s.

A one-floor business operation, the Uptown Billiard Hall had 12 billiard tables, and as the custom of those years, the tables were discretely hidden at the back of the hall, behind a partition. A large shoe shine stand, where seven people could site at once was another part of the business, recalled Yeotes. A hat cleaning service was also offered inside the store.

"Back in the '40s and '60s, people wore hats all the time. Men wore fedoras and women also wore hats that had to be cleaned and blocked every few years. It was a big part of the business. My father employed this one person just to do that. You had to know what you're doing when cleaning hats and had to have proper equipment, which we had — all the various sizes wooden blocks that were fitted into hats," said Yeotes.

Under the same roof, the business also had one confectionery/tobacco counter located towards the front part of the store.

"Back in those days customers of such businesses were 90 per cent men and women hardly ever come into billiard halls. They'd come into the front part to buy cigarettes and stuff but they'd not go into the back part where the men played pool," recalled Yeotes.

Those days, one also had to be at least 16 years old to be able to play pool, he said adding that occasionally younger boys would try to sneak in. Aside from playing pool, bowling was the popular choice of recreational activity for city and area residents, especially men, at the time.

Places like Bowl-O-Drome and Recreation Bowling Alley were also popular entertainment centres, he added.

"I remember there were three billiard halls, two or three bowling alleys and three theatres downtown those days and they were the main centre of recreational activity around here at the time."

The Uptown Billiards Hall was located in the middle of three beer parlours and Yeotes recalled customers of the old City Hotel, the Crystal Hotel across the street from his father's business and the Belvedere Hotel farther up the street would come in for hamburgers.

"Those people would drink too much and they'd come back to my father's business and want to eat a hamburger or something and sometimes they'd fall down drunk," said Yeotes. At times police had to be called in when a customer became violent, which, he noted, happened from time to time.

Noting his father to be a respected businessman and a gregarious person, Yeotes said that his father came to Canada when he was in his mid-twenties. He had trained to be a chef and when Sam Papas, another wealthy businessman in Belleville, offered him the job of a chef at his Belmont Restaurant (once located next to Mode Elle), he took the offer and settled in the city. His later successes with his own businesses, Uptown Billiard Hall and Jim's Lunch on the corner of Dundas and Church streets, became the pride of his family of five children. The older Yeotes, legacy to the community of Belleville came with his donation of the property on Turnbull Street just behind the Dairy Queen, said Yeotes.

"The original Belleville arena used to sit on that property. My father bought that in 1940. The arena was still there when he bought it and it sat on two acres of land right in the middle of the city. On that property, the city built the first senior citizens complex in Belleville. Its called Yeotes Court. It's still there," said Yeotes with an unmistakable note of pride in his voice.