

By Henry Bury
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The art of fine tailoring is alive and well in Belleville.

Joe Burke is proof of that.

The Belleville businessman is still going strong in the menswear industry — a half century after he started selling from stock and doing custom tailoring.

"After 50 years in business, I'm proud of what I know," said the 74-year-old Burke.

He even tried retirement starting in 1996 but that only lasted three-and-a-half years.

So he opened Joe Burke Men's Apparel on the second floor at 257 North Front St. and he couldn't be happier.

"I love the business. This is my hobby as much as my life. And I put my love into everything I sell," he said.

Burke initially decided to stick with custom tailoring at his North Front Street location but eventually branched out to a complete menswear store "catering to men who like fine clothing and have a problem of getting a good fit."

In stock, he carries for the short and stout as well as for big and tall in every aspect of clothing, including shirts, ties, pants, jackets and suits.

His specialty is getting custom made suits for clients.

Clients choose the material and the price range. Burke then chooses the design of suit that fits the person and cuts the material to measure.

"The suit is made for us by some of the finest designers and custom tailors left in Canada," he said.

He also does custom-made pants, jackets and ladies slacks.

His shop does have a tailor on staff to do alterations to purchases.

"We're basically an old-fashioned clothing store for people who want service, quality and expert fitting based on 50 years experience," he said proudly.

Burke followed his father's footsteps in the trade.

Harry Burke opened his men's and boy's 'furnishings' store at 281 Front St. in 1920.

"I decided at the age of 19 to enter the clothing field as well," he said.

He went to work for Goodman's store in downtown Belleville and, four years later, opened his own store on Front Street.

Burke spent 37 years at his Bay View Mall store before trying retirement in 1996.

"Retirement isn't for everyone," he quipped. "If you feel good and you love the business, why not stay in it? After all, it takes you half your life to learn the business and why not give back to the public your knowledge by offering them the service you know."