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Michael Rawls, an employee at Goerings Book Store for 23 years, assists customer Alisun Donovan with a book purchase, Tuesday, December 29, 2009 at 1717 NW 1st Avenue in Gainesville, Fla. After 38 years in business, the book store will be closing its doors.

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Published: Tuesday, December 29, 2009 at 5:34 p.m.

Last Modified: Tuesday, December 29, 2009 at 5:34 p.m.

Goerings Book Store. Center Stage Costumes & Magic. Gause and Son Jewelers. Fifi's of Gainesville.

They are among Gainesville's oldest businesses and they will cease to exist next year as either age and health, economic conditions or the difficulties of competing in an increasingly corporate and online retail environment take their toll.

Goerings is the latest to announce its intentions to close, and it's the oldest at 38 years. The store at 1717 N.W. First Ave. is known for selling textbooks to generations of college students, having a staff knowledgeable about books and literature, and supporting state and local authors with events and shelf space.

In a letter dated Dec. 26 and mailed to local publications, co-owners Elizabeth Rainbow and Thomas Rider traced the progression of competitive forces that have cut into sales.

The business split its textbook and trade store operations to two locations and moved from its original location at University Avenue and Northwest 13th Street 10 years ago when its landlord, University United Methodist, decided to redevelop its property.

The trade store closed a few years ago among competition from a Books-A-Million and a Borders that opened within two miles and a change in the entrance that hindered customer access to the store in the Westgate Shopping Center. Textbook and trade operations were consolidated in the current location.

Then two years ago, a state law requiring professors to post textbooks 30 days before the start of classes to increase Internet competition was followed by efforts by the University of Florida to favor the on-campus book store, they wrote.

Add to that competition from online retailers, books by mail and a dip in sales during the recession.

"It has become obvious at this point that an independent trade book store like Goerings Book Store was no

longer possible in the Gainesville market," the letter says.

Rider said Tuesday they would likely close by March 1.

Gause & Son Jewelers is closing its location in The Oaks Mall after 24 years as owner, and president Jerry Gause prepares to retire and turn over the reins of Ocala operations to the third generation of the family-owned business.

Gause also cited the price of gold and platinum as cutting into profits amid some conditions specific to Gainesville.

The transient university-based community makes it difficult to hire seasoned veterans and build long-term relationships with customers, he said. He also said mall lease rates are high for the market and rising, while the mall is saturated with jewelry stores.

In the meantime, Gause & Son has put extensive renovations into its two Ocala locations.

"If we come back to Gainesville, we'll probably do a freestanding store," Gause said.

He said the Gainesville store will probably be open "a little longer" than this month.

Fifi's of Gainesville upscale women's consignment shop has closed after 16 years as the owners retire from the business.

The last day of sales was Christmas Eve, while Goodwill carted off the last leftover clothes Tuesday.

Co-owner Myrna Neims said the owners are ready to retire and "some health problems factored in."

"We are definitely all retirement age if not beyond," she said with a laugh.

The economy played a secondary part as sales were down, she said.

Managing partner Elly McKnight is retiring, while Neims and Mary Horn will continue to share an office for their psychotherapy counseling business.

They tried to sell the business, but interested buyers either couldn't get the funds together or would not have been active owners.

"The way you are most profitable is if you are to work it and not have to pay salaries. Those are the biggest expenses," Neims said.

Fifi's is an independently owned affiliate of the Fernandina Beach-based chain, which started franchising after the Gainesville location opened in 1993.

Fifi's is at 3501 S.W. Second Ave., in the retail center that includes Calico Jack's Oyster Bar.

Unsold clothes were donated to local charitable organizations.

"We want to let people know how grateful we are for their support over the last 16 years," Neims said. "We had a great time. We met some of the most amazing, wonderful consignors and customers."

Center Stage owner Judi Cain announced her plans to retire and close the 29-year-old business by the end of the year after poor Halloween sales but said Tuesday she still needs to sell off enough merchandise to pay three large vendor bills. Her "going out of business" sale permit expires in mid-January, but her lease is through August.

In the meantime, she said a couple people are interested in purchasing the business, but those plans are on hold during the holidays.

"I don't know exactly what my next move is," she said.

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