

By Valerie Hoffmann

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Joseph's Market is getting a facelift.

And the operation will be painless.

A nip of an aisle here and a tuck of products there. Add a splash of paint and the 47-year-old store will look young again.

At least that's the idea behind the remodeling of the downtown grocery store located at 20 E. Lawrence Street as it enters its first phase of remodeling.

Compared to its newer competitors, the store built in 1956 is really showing its age.

While the facade doesn't look so bad, the tiled floor is chipped, the walls are yellow and the ceiling is stained from water leaks.

An aisle once occupied by pickles and canned goods stands empty as part-owner Dennis Joseph explains that part of the remodeling is to widen the aisle for more departments.

"We're adding a dollar section, which will give customers better products at cheaper prices," Joseph said, pointing to the cork boards missing their shelving. "Me and Georgie (his brother) were always told to give people quality and they'll come back," he added.

And that is one way the store has aged gracefully.

Joseph has always offered quality products and service to his customers such as produce at low prices. And by updating his facility and adding new departments, he'll be able to continue doing so and fend off some competitors.

New Castle resident Joe Bondie shops at Joseph's Market for the produce saying it's too expensive at competitors. He said he would come to Joseph's more often for other items if the store was cleaned up a bit.

That's part of the plan. Other changes include expanding the pharmacy for a pick up/drop off window and more products, painting the walls and ceilings, retiling the chipped floor, and adding a floral department.

Mary Montgomery of Division Street said she uses the pharmacy and will frequent it more if more is offered.

Despite the difficult economy, Joseph said the remodeling, estimated to cost \$100,000, comes at a feasible time since he recently joined a new supplier, Nash Finch.

Joseph's former wholesaler, Flemming Foods, was bought out by the S and N Co.

"It caused chaos," Joseph said. "They dissected them like a frog and sold the different parts."

So he was left to find a new supplier and Joseph credits Nash Finch with some great ideas incorporated in the remodeling.

Starting Feb. 3 and lasting until Feb. 5 about 50 employees from Nash Finch will be doing a store reset at Joseph's Market. Joseph explained products will be moved around and items will be retagged.

But there is some remodeling customers won't see, such as fixing the leaky roof.

"The roof is 80 percent new," Joseph said. "It's the other 20 percent that's giving us nothing but agony."

The compressor room which operates refrigeration for the coolers and freezers is also going to be reorganized.

While updating the store will enable Joseph to serve his customers better, he doesn't expect it to bring in new customers. He's more focused on his long-time customers who have been aging alongside his store.

"We don't scout and worry," he said of his competitors adding the first Joseph's Market was built in 1915 on Long Avenue and the store has lived to see 2004.

Joseph said that although larger competitors tend to push small family-owned businesses to the wayside and attract younger shoppers, he offers some things competitors don't. Quality produce and meats at low prices, homemade Italian bread and sausage from a family recipe and a variety of ethnic foods.