

Funeral director marks 25th year in city



Walt Sundquist, outside the downtown Farmington funeral home he has owned and operated for the past 25 years.

A civic booster, he senses 'caring attitude'

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

Monday was a special day for Walt Sundquist, one of downtown Farmington's biggest fans.

It marked his 25th year of owning one of the city's landmark businesses, the Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home, which dates back to 1950.

Sundquist, 63, is the seventh owner. The first, Sergius P. Lyon, was a town leader in the mid-19th century.

Sundquist started as a mortician 38 years ago in Detroit. He later worked for Northrop & Son Funeral Home in Redford Township.

He bought Spencer J. Heeney Funeral Home on Farmington Road in Farmington on May 1, 1964, from Florence Heeney. Her husband, Spencer, acquired it from his brother, William Heeney, in 1922.

"I made Mrs. Heeney one of 32 officers and I had no money," Sundquist said Monday. "But she sold it to me for less than she could've gotten because I guess she liked me. We had a good working relationship."

Sundquist has watched the number of full-time employees on his payroll jump from one to seven. But he's not about to retire. "What would I do? I think I'd be lost. I enjoy the business and I like working with people."

COUNSELING FAMILIES in mourning is one of his personal rewards. "The confidence people show by coming to me as a funeral director or as a friend is particularly satisfying," he said. "A funeral is the last thing they'll do for a loved one and they want everything just right."

Shorter visitation periods is one change Sundquist has noticed over the past 25 years in the funeral business. "Where it used to last 4-6 days, it now usually lasts two days," he said.

A longtime civic leader with a penchant for beautification, Sundquist today senses in Farmington "a more caring attitude among business people and among people in the community."

"People now feel more responsible for their community," he said. "They're more thoughtful about how it looks."

An avid supporter of the Downtown Development Authority streetscape improvements, he says the central business district is "well on its way" back to prosperity.

But he's still linked by some absentee landlords along Grand River.

"There are still some who'll never think of cutting the grass or keeping their buildings looking nice," he said.

Sundquist grew up on a farm in the Upper Peninsula and lived there until he entered the Navy in 1942. His green thumb was nurtured by life on the family farm in Crystal Falls. "I was always concerned about cutting the grass and making everything look nice," he said.

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— Walt Sundquist



Spencer J. Heeney owned and operated the funeral home from 1922 until he died in 1963.

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