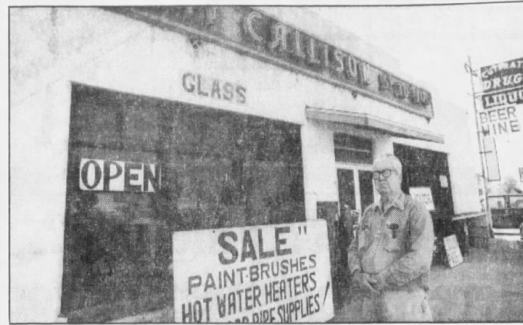


2 East

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Continued from Page 1



Fernie Garcia / El Paso Times

Jerry Callison hopes for renewed good times for his Alameda neighborhood: "Remember, history repeats itself," he said.

Alameda

Continued from Page 1

so much traffic on this road and it was bound to come no matter what happened. It had to be done then — the right of way was getting more expensive every day."

The closing of Callison's may be the end of an era, and fewer people remember what old Alameda was like.

Callison said that at one time, people thought about converting Alameda into a freeway, but the idea was not feasible because the right of way was too expensive.

"I had a lot of my people down here mad that we were putting the freeway because they knew it was going to hurt their business and I knew it would hurt mine, but I had to do it because of progress. You can't stop that. There were a lot of people against the freeway, and there still are."

Managers of motels, which were very popular in the area, were angry that traffic would shift to the north, Callison said.

He suggested that they remodel each room with a kitchenette. Today, many of the former motels serve as small apartment complexes. And used car lots are now more widely seen businesses in the area.

"We just found different ways of marketing our businesses," Callison said. "I started changing my ideas and stocking more hardware and dry goods — more like a department store."

But despite all the efforts, Alameda has not been able to regain its status as a leading business area, he said.

Callison said Alameda has seen many changes that have had great impact on businesses.

When he started his business, Alameda was the main road leading into and out of El Paso.

"I had a lot of my people down here mad that we were putting the freeway because they knew it was going to hurt their business and I knew it would hurt mine, but I had to do it because of progress. You can't stop that."

Jerry Callison

At first, the store was surrounded by farms.

When the area was annexed by the city in the late 1940s, it meant big changes for the store.

"There weren't nearly as many people as there are now, but everyone had a little orchard or farm. Some people had their own cows and pigs and chickens. They all had large or small tracts of land, but there weren't nearly as many people."

Callison said the annexation did a lot to do away with the animals. Ordinances on cleanliness and laws against burning brush made it difficult to keep farms.

"So people started selling their land for residential sites, and that is what you have now."

As a result, Callison had to give up selling many of his farm items.

He said he no longer sells horse harnesses for team horses, feed, or one of his biggest items — hay.

"Hay was a big thing for many at the time. That's how many animals people had out here."

Callison said his store's best years were right before the area was annexed by the city — during the early 1950s.

"I couldn't run them off," he said. "I had them standing in line. The war was over and they took off all of the restrictions on things like

lumber and metal — especially used for plumbing. But then came the annexation, and little by little I began knocking off the items that weren't selling anymore because the farms were disappearing."

Business was so good he had five employees.

Next came the I-10 construction. And once businesses adjusted themselves to surviving despite the freeway, the peso devaluation hit them hard in the late 1970s by taking away much of the trade from Mexican customers, Callison said.

"The peso devaluation hurt me about as much as the freeway. The (Mexican) people may not have bought something from me, but they may have bought something from a neighbor — and then that neighbor would come buy something from me. We would be creating a business cycle. That is rarely the case now," Callison said.

The Lower Valley remains a highly populated area, but business is not booming like in other parts of El Paso. Many area residents choose to shop north of the freeway, drawn by shopping center crowds and the concentration of retail advertising for those stores, he said.

Callison said he uses little advertising. "People just tell each other about us."

Alameda businesses, he said, find it tougher to bring in customers because the only advertising most of them can afford are signs, and stricter sign ordinances don't even allow them to use some types of signs in front of their stores and shops anymore.

But Callison hopes the new Zaragoza bridge may spur new business growth in the Lower Valley, including Alameda. And he's even optimistic that mom-and-pop stores such as Callison's may re-emerge.

"Remember, history repeats itself," he said.

Pet

by donations. Besides buying pet food, the money is used for a

Those interested in receiving the free food can call the society

The price of progress

Mom-and-pop store on Alameda survived I-10, other changes

By Emily Jauregui
El Paso Times

As an Alameda Avenue merchant during the 1950s, Jerry Callison knew that plans to build a freeway through El Paso would cripple business along Alameda.

But as an El Paso County Commissioner, Callison knew that Interstate 10 was vital for the city's growth — even at the expense of his own livelihood.

Callison's, 7570 Alameda, is one of the few mom-and-pop stores that have survived the advent of the freeway. Founded in 1946 and still operated by Callison and his wife, Mildred, the Lower Valley institution sells everything from hardware to hard liquor.

Callison is now 74, and although he has no immediate plans to retire, he says he can't run the store much longer.

I-10 is only one of several reasons why his business hardly compares to its heyday — when hay was one of his biggest moneymakers. The transition of the area from farms to city-annexed land and the peso's devaluation also have taken trade away from Callison's, he said.

But the interstate was the only factor that Callison was directly involved in. During his tenure as a county commissioner from 1954 to 1962, Callison was involved in buying the right of way for I-10.

"I-10 hurt me, too, but I'm still glad I did it," he said. "Sure, I thought it would be bad for Alameda. But we had

Please see **Alameda / Page 2**



Fernie Garcia / El Paso Times

Jerry Callison rummages through some hardware looking for a pipe fitting for a customer.

At Callison's, hardware is just half the story

Step into Callison's and step back in time.

To the right, as you enter the store at 7570 Alameda, are building and plumbing materials, shovels, rakes, hoes and paint. Hardware includes electrical plugs, screws and washers.

To the left are kitchen knick-knacks, from pressure cooker liners to cookie cutters, and mops, brooms and sponges.

"Some of this stuff is so old that people get a real bargain because I don't even change the price," owner

Jerry Callison said, pointing at 20-cent glass furniture casters and 69-cent robe hooks.

Also for sale is clothing, including jeans, lingerie, shirts and shoes, cast-iron pots and pans, ammunition and liquor. Callison said he's been selling liquor at the

store for 30 years, and was "grandfathered in" when tougher liquor-license laws were passed.

A real bargain is the fabric, thread and trim Callison is closing out. Most of the fabric and trim is less than 50 cents per yard.