

ELSEWHERE IN EL PASO

Canutillo businesses remain family affairs

By Donna Weeks

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Canutillo was a bustling cluster of businesses on a two-lane dirt road in 1924 when E.C. Sierra opened Central Market.

Sierra died in 1971 and today his grandson, Danny Sierra, runs the store at the corner of Central and Doniphan streets that also is a landmark of the unincorporated community.

"My grandfather's house used to be right here at the back of the store," Sierra pointed to a meat locker. "This used to be a bedroom."

The store still has only three aisles, and merchandise fills every nook and cranny.

Danny Sierra's father, E.C. Sierra, Jr., owned the business until he died last year.

"We still get business from as far north as Anthony and as far south as El Paso," Sierra said.

Next door is The Broadway grocery, which Abraham Hakim opened in 1932 next door to Central Market, said his widow, Ofelia Hakim. Abraham, who came to El Paso in 1925 from Lebanon, died in 1965.

He purchased and remodeled the building that had once been a restaurant into a grocery store, Ofelia Hakim said.

"There was plenty of busi-

ness," Hakim said. "I remember wagons full of people coming to buy groceries, across the river before there was a bridge there. People could not afford cars."

Hakim also remembers hearing the sounds of a drum beating at the old theater a block away.

The Julimes Theater has been vacant since the 1950s when it was last used as apartment housing.

During its heyday — the 1920s through the 1940s — ranchers and cattle smugglers en route to Arizona from Texas paid top dollar to see shows from Dallas, Austin and Houston.

Professional wrestlers and magicians also performed in the theater before it closed.

Owner Fernando Carrasco's daughters often danced in the theater. The sisters, Charlotta Villescas and Esther Heldt, are now in their late 80s and still live in Canutillo in the 700 block of First Street, across from the old theater.

George Fritz Jr., 79, son of one of the town's first businessmen, still lives there. About 200 people lived there when he was born, he said.

His father, George Fritz Sr., owned General Mercantile, at corner of First and Doniphan. The building, once a post office, is now vacant.