

## **Roberts Carpets: A Herndon Institution**

By Chuck Mauro

Roberts Carpets and Oriental Rug Co. has been in business in Herndon for 40 years, selling carpets, wood flooring, and ceramic tile.

Chuck Roberts, the owner of Robert's Carpets, started doing business in Herndon at 697 Spring Street, in the building that now is home to Jimmy's Old Town Tavern. Twenty years later, Chuck moved it to the current location, a few doors away at 681 Spring Street. The building that houses Jimmy's today dates to 1897, when the original owner, Magnus T. Wilkins, opened a general store there.

Roberts Carpets operated in Alexandria for six years before opening a second store in Herndon. Chuck ran into Reston developer Robert E. Simon in the early '60s, saw what he was doing, and decided to move to Herndon. "You could lay down in the middle of Elden Street at lunch time and you wouldn't have got run over. It was that slow at that time," Chuck said.

He recalled that what is now the Tele-Fix TV repair store at 695 Spring Street was an ice cream shop, and the building between that and the current carpet store was Hazel's Carryout Restaurant, which opened at 3:30 each morning and served a good old country breakfast. Hazel's closed in 1986, and Jimmy's owner Jimmy Cirrito now uses it for his catering business.

Uncertain when the building at his current location was built, Chuck said it was originally a Sanitary Grocery, which was later bought out by Safeway. There was a printing shop and three or four other small businesses in the building when he bought it in 1987, and even then he rented parts of the building out to other businesses.

Chuck's son currently works for him, his daughter handles the bookkeeping, and a grandson worked for him for seven years. That makes three generations who have been part Roberts Carpets.

Asked what has changed the most since he moved here, he replied, "Traffic and the amount of people working here." There were still plenty of dairy farms around the town when he arrived. There was even a guy who regularly drove a horse-drawn wagon through town.

Chuck initially relied on business from Reston. He was the only flooring store between Herndon and Tysons Corner. And, because of the high rents in Tysons, the prices in those stores were double those at Roberts.

Chuck is a certified diver and still enjoys diving in the warm waters in Florida and the Caribbean. He keeps a collection of his prize shells in his store. He also has a wall in the store on which he keeps a multitude of pictures of family and friends along with the first dollar he ever earned, paid to him by his mother.

Chuck eventually closed his business in Alexandria as his business grew in the Herndon area grew. Chuck said he still enjoys serving his customers, whom he says are the “finest bunch of people you’d ever want to meet.”