CLOSING ITS DOORS AFTER 67 YEARS

Abdalla's downtown ends an era

Louis P. Rom
Staff Writer

LAFAYETTE — It's the end of an era in downtown retail.

Abdalla's department store, a Jefferson Street mainstay since 1931, is closing its doors.

The store, owned by the Irma Abdalla and Herbert Abdalla families, is located at 412 Jefferson St. It will be closed through Sunday, so clerks can mark down the merchandise. It will reopen Monday for a $3 million liquidation sale.

The Abdalla family, which owns three Abdalla's department stores in Acadiana, closed its New Iberia store Dec. 22. And until its closing a few years ago, there was an Abdalla's in Opelousas, founded by the patriarch of the family, Jake Abdalla.

No one from the Abdalla family could be reached for comment, but a store representative said the store should remain open for a few weeks.

Cathy Webre, director of Lafayette's Downtown Development Authority, said she was not surprised to hear about the closing.

"It's not totally unexpected, but we greet the news with sadness and loss," Webre said.

"Initially their departure will create some kind of a void down there," she said. "But when one door closes another one opens up — the facility itself presents some opportunities."

Webre remains optimistic about the revitalization of downtown, which has experienced a resurgence of late.

"We continue to feel very good about downtown, it's strengthening every day and that's evidenced by new projects.

Optimists need not look far for proof of a downtown rebirth."

On Friday, Sidebar, a cigar room and grill at Gordon Square at the corner of Jefferson Street and Vermilion Avenue, celebrated its grand opening.

Owner Shannon Wilkerson, who already owns five restaurants and bars in Lafayette, said the time was right to invest in downtown.

"I haven't heard anyone tell me that I'm crazy for going downtown," Wilkerson said.

"I think it's just changing. It used to be a couple of big department stores, now a lot more offices and places like this are opening up," said Wilkerson, who owns the Bulldog on General Mouton and Peets, off Pinhook Road. "I'm very encouraged."

A pedestrian passes the Abdalla's department store in downtown Lafayette Friday. Signs herald the store will be closing its doors after 67 years in business.