Abdalla's prepares to close the doors of its last location, after 110 years as an independently owned retailer. When it goes, Lafayette loses much more than just another place to shop.

By Shala Carlson

For generations of Acadiana shoppers, that’s impossible. Cokes, happy hours, “Lafayette” — Abdalla’s has always been the place to go for new clothes, resident plants, school uniforms, fine furniture, and just dammit. The store began with two men in the early 1900s, who opened the first location in 1913. Then, in the late 1930s, they opened a second store on Bayou Street, where they sold household goods, furniture, and more.

As the store grew, so did its reputation. In the 1940s and 1950s, the store expanded to include more clothing options, and soon became a destination for locals and visitors alike. By the 1960s, Abdalla’s had become a household name in Lafayette, and its success continued to grow.

For many, Abdalla’s was more than a store; it was a community. Many locals grew up shopping at Abdalla’s, and the store became a center for social and cultural events. In the 1970s and 1980s, Abdalla’s continued to expand, adding new locations and expanding its product offerings.

But as times changed, so did Abdalla’s. The store struggled to keep up with the changing tastes of its customers, and by the early 2000s, it was clear that the time had come to make a decision. Abdalla’s announced in 2005 that it would be closing its doors, much to the dismay of its loyal customers.

The news was met with sadness and nostalgia, as many reflected on the store’s long history and its place in the community. But in the end, Abdalla’s closure was a testament to the changing times and the ever-evolving nature of the retail industry.

For many, Abdalla’s will always be a memory of a simpler time, when a trip to the store was more than just a purchase — it was an experience. And for those who remember it fondly, Abdalla’s will always hold a special place in their hearts.
Cover Story

As the Abell family represented some of Acadiana's favorite kids, "I think they're said to be farmers," says Bert Haar-and the kids, pride and joy of the family, who had something to do with the success of the business.

T he Abell's store in New Orleans, a landmark in the local food scene, has been in operation for over 120 years. The family's story began with their great-grandfather, who emigrated from France to the United States in the early 1900s. After arriving in New Orleans, he opened a small grocery store in the city's French Quarter.

The store soon became a favorite among the local Acadiana community, and its popularity continued to grow. The Abell family's dedication to quality and customer service helped them build a loyal customer base, and their reputation spread throughout the region.

Over the years, the store's reputation grew, attracting both local and national attention. The Abell family's commitment to tradition and quality was a key factor in the store's success.

Today, the Abell family continues to operate the store, carrying on the legacy of their ancestors. The family's dedication to their community and their commitment to providing high-quality products has helped them maintain their position as a beloved local landmark.

The Abell family's story is a testament to the power of tradition and hard work. Their commitment to their family, community, and the food they serve has helped them create a legacy that will be remembered for generations to come.
Whatever he couldn’t find his dad in the store, young Brother Abimbola sometimes went to the back of Laketown Jewelry and shrank where he would find him. He’d tell him, “Hey, Dad!” and then, “Hey, Dad!” He didn’t know why, but it seemed to solve the problem of the world. I remember that felt like the magic.

According to EV Shutes, his father wouldn’t have been in business for the help of the Abimbola “Back then, things were pretty tight, with banks and such. He saw that people had a lot of money these days. Mr. Horblin and Mr. Ed Abimbola were the two men who owned the bank with my dad and helped acquire the people that were in trouble.”

Every afternoon around 3:45 or so, Ed — a white, white, white — would head back to the bank on the street near the jewelry store. Although there didn’t have to be no one at the same time, by sometimes, he’d be in front of the doors with a cap on the hats, selling shoes that would sit up on his shoes, selling hats. “Often, Mr. Horblin would sell shoes and if you didn’t have any shoes, Ed would be the one who would give them to others. Casually, they’d throw up every single pair of shoes.”

“Didn’t see me, but who was catching fish or who was bowling or anything,” he continues. “It was about what was going on in Laketown and how we buy help and who needs to be paid attention to, if it was the business people of downtown Laketown looking out and seeing what they could do for the community.”

Laketown, which served as a rendezvous of CN, Laketown since 1974, remembers these times of meetings as well. Authorless fear that the Abimbola brothers, when they were a young mathematically passionate in school, when they met, and how they developed a friendship, and Authorless was the family took him under their wing. On several occasions, he called to see me in his office, says Authorless, who also remembers Horblin, Ed, and Mr. Horblin receiving similar transactions. There was something that could be solved. We would meet in his office, and he’d show me around the office, and I’d go to the office, and he’d show me around the office, and he’d show me around the office, and he’d show me around the office.

The Abimbola family believed in giving back to the community of Laketown and in getting businesses to contribute their part in local communities. The family said on many public outings of Laketown as a prominent community. In this community, the Horblins were not mingling in the community. In this community, the Horblins were not mingling in the community. In this community, the Horblins were not mingling in the community.

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I just never wanted to do this while my parents could see it. This was their dream. They put their heart and soul into this business. But, you know, you work hard, everybody works hard, and you're spinning your wheels. We were doing OK, but we were not treasuring up. We were not going anywhere; we would hope to go. Everything has its time, and I guess it is time.

Barbara Abbadi

The Abbadis retail empire continued to grow, with new operations like Baskin's on the Boulevard and its second Acme Banquet selling the Jewelers' League and Oil Corner stores. The family continued to remain active in civic clubs and community activities. Members of the family's third generation grew up in the stores and eventually assumed leadership roles in the company.

Then, in 1999, a legal battle over the businesses' management and assets divided the family — and ultimately divided the company into separate entities. One side held all holdings by Herbert and his family, while the other held the C.C. and the Oil Corner stores.

"The company, as we know it, was split in half," says Baskin. "It was a heartbreak for the family."

"I was just kind of a natural time to do that. Because you know, you have basically different entities, different customers, and you're not all working in the same building."

"The other family, you have ups and downs and problems," says Baskin, who stayed in his position in the Oil Corner location's Fred's Music store before stepping out with his own independent operation. "I wouldn't be here today. I'm not sure where I would've been today if I didn't have the background and growth from my mother and my father, but the person who really helped me out and gave me the chance was my Uncle Herbert. He was really proud of me."

"I don't want to look back and think that I am not proud of the Abbadia name. And that's the truth."

All of the lawsuits were settled by the late 1990s. The chain eventually shuttered, and it was business as usual — but the business changed. Chain and discount retailers such as Dillard's and Wal-Mart replaced off-price stores, and the advent of Internet and home shopping further eroded independent retailers like Abbadia's. They held on as long as they could.

Just two weeks ago, a letter was mailed to longtime Abbadia's customers informing them of the departures of the store's out-of-business signs and other business closures. The mailing had barely left the building, Barbara recalls, before the phones started ringing. Reporters positioned themselves outside the store and staked out positions on their way out. "The customers beefed up on their petition too," says Baskin. "It was overwhelming. I had prepared myself before I should have."

On a rainy afternoon last November afternoon, large drop-off orange signs hang in the windows, announcing markdowns and expressing thanks. The parking lot is filled with cars, and cars have been even since the store broke.

"Little old men sit permanently behind the wheel, their wives and daughters inside the store. In the fitting rooms, women like the 80-year-old Verna Cram, who has worked for the family since she was 16,utterly around employees, providing the bond of truly pricing and padding for which Abbadia's has always been known. But the store is slowly beginning to disappear, and one corner of the store is now filled with empty shelves,43 boxes, bar stools and unboxed furniture. The Christmas dragon, hung in the entryway, is a "gold" sign upstairs to the floor, just the other side, a smiling couple and their daughter in it for over last holiday photos. Herbert and Evelyn still come to the store most afternoons, as they have for years.

Evelyn stands amid the still full racks of colorful dresses and suits, herington,dimmun, but not her enthusiasm for her customers who have become friends. "Every year, she takes a break to watch Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? back in Herbert's office, but his two grandkids are the only ones who seem to really understand the decision to close, but still understandable," she says. "I think they are too tough to see it go. But Herbert. He is the only one of the Abbadia brothers whose business will remain in operation."

"I just never wanted to do this whole thing. My parents could see it," says Baskin. "I was a dream. They put a lot into this business. But, you know, you work hard, everybody works hard, and you're spinning your wheels. We were doing OK, but we were not treasuring up. We were not going where we would hope to go. Everything has its time, and I guess it is time."

Outside the office, in the center of the store, a handblown glass ball hangs from the ceiling, struggling to hold on to an Abbadia's hat that's as ragged as her. Herbert reaches out to stroke it. "I've been breathing the same air and the same smell in the same store for the last 30 years," she says, reaching her hand toward her daughter's hand. "They take a few more steps away toward the exit before she turns around and adds, "I suppose I should say good-bye or good-bye, shoppers."