

# Signature

DEFINING LIFE IN NORTH JERSEY



## A neighborhood photo store preserves the past and meets needs of the iPhone era

By JOAN VERDON  
STAFF WRITER

The Picture Spa store on East Ridgewood Avenue, Paramus, in a strip mall across the street from The Fashion Center, is always busy in May, just before Mother's Day, and in June, at graduation time. But it is busiest in December, when customers stream in, looking to turn a favorite photograph into a greeting card or gift.

"The best thing is everyone who walks in needs something different," said the shop's owner, Sid Davidowitz, a 50-year veteran of the photo business, starting when he was a 10-year-old helping out in his father's store in Bayonne.

There's the young mother who needs to get a picture of her daughter off her iPhone and onto a Christmas card. The man who walks in with a box of old photographs he wants scanned onto a DVD for a memorial service. The woman who wants an old slide turned into a photo enlargement.

And Davidowitz, who in his lifetime has seen color film replace black and white, one-hour photo processing replace mail-away photo labs, digital replace film, and now, phones replacing cameras, has managed to stay in business by being able to do all things for all people.

When digital cameras began edging out film processing, Davidowitz, then an owner of a Moto Photo shop in Paramus, installed computer kiosks at his cash register counter, where customers could insert their digital memory cards and select pictures for printing. He noticed that people were spending a lot of time standing at the kiosks, so he added stools.

Then, in 2006, as he realized that the future of photo imaging stores no longer lay with people dropping off rolls of film but in helping people create with their digital images, he took over the storefront next door and built The Picture Spa, a "digital living room" with soft music, complimentary coffee, comfortable chairs and a dozen computers where customers can view their photos and turn them into photo books, posters or cards.

"It changed us from an order-taking business to a place people wanted to spend time in," he said.

Janet Scott, 56, of Ho-Ho-Kus came to the store to get a Christmas card photograph taken of her 18-year-old cockapoo, Butterscotch, dressed up as the Energizer Bunny. "I live here," she said.

Scott has used The Picture Spa's computers to design photo books and make prints of digital images. "The only thing I haven't done here is work the cash registers," she said. A few days before her photo session with Butterscotch, she was there, picking up a Christmas gift, a makeup case embossed with one of her photos. A week before that, she came in with a rush job: She needed a photo taken off her iPhone and turned into an enlargement for her uncle's funeral.

She knows she could get some of the same services online, or from a kiosk in a chain store, but she

See **PHOTOS** Page 2



AMY NEWMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sid Davidowitz, the owner of The Picture Spa in Paramus, sees his store as "a digital living room" where customers can create a variety of products from cherished memories.

THE RECORD

SIGNATURE

## Photos: For the iPhone age

From Page 1

likes The Picture Spa's neighborhood atmosphere. "I need people; I need contact," she said.

The store does still process film on site. Chris Riley, 45, of Hasbrouck Heights walked in recently with an old Minolta camera that had been sitting in his parents' house "for 20-something years." The camera turned out to have an old roll of color film inside. Riley, a producer for Life Sports Television, said he has used The Picture Spa to do 11-by-14 enlargements for his office. He's also emailed the store photos from his phone and asked, "How large can you make this? Tell me what you can do with this."

"It's a small business, and you get taken care of," Riley said.

Most days, several people are working at the computers, and customers talk to each other about their projects while they wait for images to download from memory cards or from their phones.

On a recent afternoon, Edward Brady, 43, of Saddle Brook was designing a holiday card using a picture of his 4-year-old son with the Paramus Park Santa Claus, which he shot on his iPhone. "I absolutely can print these at home," said Brady, who is an IT specialist, "but it's too much trouble." And at The Picture Spa, he could get a second opinion on which background worked best for the card: the red, the blue or the black. His wife, however, made the final call, after Brady snapped a shot of the

**"I live here. The only thing I haven't done here is work the cash registers."**

JANET SCOTT, A CUSTOMER FROM HO-HO-KUS

card design on his phone and sent it to her.

At the checkout counter, Lee Anne Luing, 47, of Saddle River was picking up 150 prints the store had made from images on her camera and phone. She's made photo books for her mother's 75th birthday and her parents' 50th anniversary, and had her photos printed on pillows, blankets and phone covers as gifts. She said she's also tried online services like Shutterfly and also printed from her home computer, but finds it much easier to "let Sid do it."

Tricia Ramdass, 35, of Ridgewood, who was loading photos from her iPhone at another computer, also for a holiday card, said one of her favorite Picture Spa projects was an enlargement the store made of an old photo of her husband at age 4. It now hangs in her house, with a picture of her at age 4, and one of their daughter at age 4.

While Brady and Ramdass were designing their cards, Tony Cainero, 78, of Paramus came in to check on a labor of love in memory of his wife, Franca, who died in March. He had gathered more than 100 photographs of Franca, dating to the 1930s and 1940s, when she was a girl growing up in France and Italy, along with photos of their wedding and their 51 years of married life to-

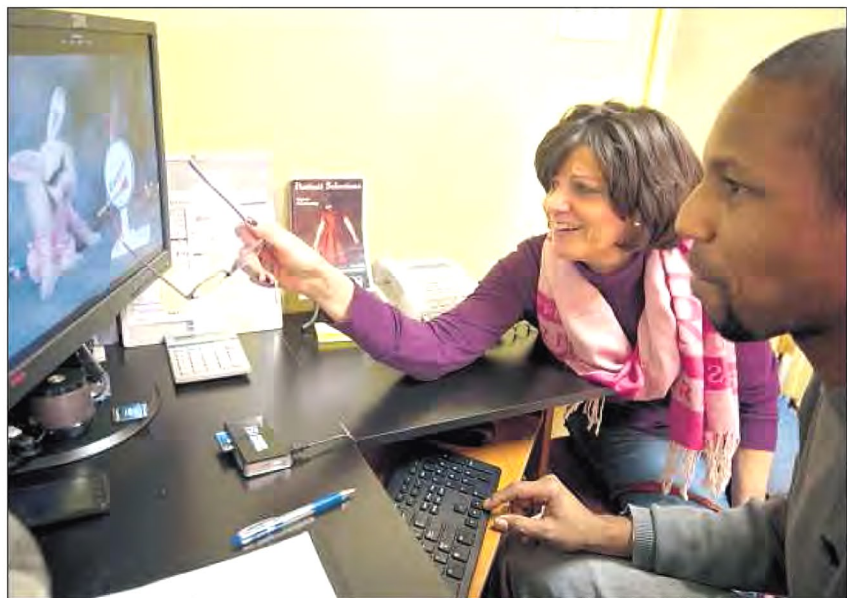
gether, and was working with The Picture Spa's general manager, Jim Morello, to create a calendar that told a different chapter of Franca's life on each page.

He was there to proofread the final design before the store printed 44 copies for family and friends. Cainero teared up as he looked at the cover page, a photo of his wife in her wedding gown, with the caption he had written: "She was the best thing that happened in my life."

Morello, who has worked at The Picture Spa for nine years, said he gets caught up in the emotions of customers like Cainero. "I have to live that emotion as I'm doing it," he said. "It's not just a matter of pushing buttons and arranging photographs."

Davidowitz came out from the processing lab behind the checkout counter with a pile of faded, torn and water-damaged photos — many of them wedding scenes and family portraits — that The Picture Spa has restored. Those photos remind him, he said, that while the technology of photos seems to change every six months these days, the reason we take pictures — to preserve memories — hasn't changed, and that keeps him in business.

Email: [verdon@northjersey.com](mailto:verdon@northjersey.com); Twitter: @JoanVerdon



AMY NEWMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Janet Scott, a longtime Picture Spa customer from Ho-Ho-Kus, edits pictures of her dog, Butterscotch, for her Christmas card with the help of manager Teron Anscombe.



**61A East Ridgewood Avenue  
Paramus, NJ  
201-265-8400**

**[www.PictureSpa.com](http://www.PictureSpa.com)  
[www.facebook.com/picturespa](http://www.facebook.com/picturespa)**