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Cochran, Blair & Potts is the oldest department store in Texas



Michelle Rodriguez / Belton Journal

(Left to right) Robert Potts, Jr. and his brother Michael at Cochran, Blair & Potts Department Store. Robert is the president and Michael is the vice-president.

By Michelle Rodriguez
The Belton Journal

Cochran, Blair & Potts has been in business since 1869; for 156 years. They are located at 221 E. Central Ave. at the corner of Central and Penelope.

“The museum upstairs is closed due to storm damage. The store was closed a few days, but will re-open after New Years. There are a lot of cool things like a library of ledger books. We have the original from 1869,” said President, Robert Potts, Jr.

Some museum items are downstairs and can be viewed at the store front window. There is a drawer that was used to hold patterns in the fabric department. There is also an old Bell County notary. There is even a coin holder and change maker that was used from 1900 until 1982.

The store takes up the whole side of the block on Penelope St. There are 4 entrances open to the public. The store space is 12,000 square feet. They moved to the current building in 1884. The cast iron columns on the outside of the building are original from 1887.

“We did a renovation project in 2016. We renovated the inside of the building. On the exterior, they finished an enhancement project with new structural work, awnings, and lights,” said Potts.

The departments are women’s, men’s, kid’s, gifts, and shoes. The women’s department was originally upstairs. They also had bridal gowns.

It’s a family business. They’ve been owned by the same family for 140 years. Pott’s father, Robert Potts, Sr. is retired. His brother, Michael Potts, is the vice-president and does clerical and accounting work. His wife, Ashley Potts, does the buying.

“Our key employee is Dorinda Gianarelli. She’s a rock star salesperson,” said Potts.

Their shoes are the most purchased item. They have On brand tennis shoes and Red Wing brand work boots.

Throughout their history, they’ve maintained one constant factor of “delivering the highest level of customer service.”

All County Surveying formed in 1988 by Charles “Chuck” Lucko

By **Michelle Rodriguez**
The Belton Journal

Chuck Lucko is a registered professional land surveyor. He started his business from his home in Temple and it grew to what it is today. Their office is located at 4330 S. 5th St. in Temple. They perform all type of surveys from residential lot, land acreage, and subdivision to topographic, engineering design, construction layout and staking, and commercial ALTA and as-built surveys.

Lucko attended Temple College back when it was called Temple Junior College. He

worked for Bruce Mause while going to Texas State Technical College in Waco. He earned his associates degree in engineering and took a surveying job in Houston with an urban engineering company.

“My crew leader was taking the truck to the beach on the weekends. They made me a temporary crew lead. I studied and ended up being named the permanent crew,” said Lucko.

He worked in Houston until 1988 while the economy was still flat. He decided to get his license in civil engineering and went back home to Temple to work. He got married the same year.

“I would work in the field all day and then do drawings at night. I just kind of grew a reputation,” said Lucko.

When hiring employees Lucko likes to look for a good person over skills. He believes that skills are trainable when people have a good attitude.

“I had a friend of mine named Dwayne working for me around 1990 or so and we went over to try to get some work. We went to a realtor’s luncheon. We looked up marketing tricks and made origami pianos and put them on each

See **CHUCK**,

Page 4

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Chuck - From Page 3

realtor's table with a business card in it. The next day the phones were ringing off the hook," said Lucko.

One notable project is the big sewer line that runs water through the creek from the park all the way to the sewer plant between Temple and Belton. It is the oldest sewer line in Temple.

"My main goal has been to tell people what we're going to do, then how much it will cost, and then do it. If you could do

that, then you can be successful. Just treat people nice and follow through," said ..

Another project he likes is one that started in 2007. They are still working on it today.

"There's a project we worked on with a local engineering company. We've done a lot of surveys at the Temple airport. The cities of Belton and Temple have been really good," said Lucko.



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Monica Sobotka continues her mom's life work at Custom Draperies by Lydia

By Michelle Rodriguez
The Belton Journal

Custom Draperies by Lydia is a window treatment specialist company offering drapery and shutter installation and window treatments. They do work from Waco to Georgetown to Lampasas. They are located at 1305 N. Main St. in Belton. "Mom married dad. He was in the army. They met in Germany. She got her citizenship and started the business at home in the garage in 1972. They moved by Royal Oaks Plaza where the t-shirt shop is. They built the building we are in now in 1983 and been here since," said Monica Sobotka. Their ribbon cutting was on Nov. 18, 1986 and was in the newspaper that week. Everything fabric-wise is made at the shop in the workroom. They offer shades, blinds, and shutters. The newest popular items are motorized shades, blinds, and drapery rods. "I always worked with mom since she started the business at home. I helped before and after school. I did this the majority of my life. Dad retired from the military. He passed in 2000. Mom retired back in 2012," said Sobotka. Sobotka likes a good stable cotton fabric with a tight weave. A looser weave fabric



Belton Journal/Michelle Rodriguez

Monica Sobotka with Custom Draperies by Lydia, posing in front of window treatment samples at her store. She took over her mother's business when she retired in 2012. They've been in business since 1972.

causes shifting. It has to work with the application that it will be used for. "Lee Jofa is my favorite fabric because there are no flaws, it's good quality, and made of cotton," said Sobotka. They build cornices and padded headboards. They've even sewn flags!

"We made the attendance banners for the junior high. We've had a lot of good projects. We do commercial buildings with big windows 250 feet tall. We did the PNC bank downtown, quite a bit at UMHB, and Baylor, Scott and White. I love every job honestly. An artist wanted to

do a prairie ship. We took the machines to Temple and constructed it," said Sobotka. Sobotka is also involved in the women in the outdoors group. She's been doing it for 25 years. She's an event coordinator.

"Mom got started when we lived in Copperas Cove when I was 3. Dad was sent to Korea for the Korean war. She answered an ad in the local paper. A lady was looking for a seamstress. My siblings were at school and I would go with mom. I played with Maggie Bush's daughter. We were the same age. Our parents would sew. We are still friends today," said Sobotka. "I have 2 sons. They live in the Dallas area. My husband and I have 5 grandkids. One of my grandkids, Sydney, likes to come during school break to sew. Last time, we did a skirt, blanket, and pillows. I taught her how to measure and pattern match," said Sobotka.

Their long-time employee Irma Pedrasa is like family. She's worked there for 44 years. She has been a big part of making Custom Draperies by Lydia the best.

The oldest business in Bell County, The Belton Journal turns 159

By **Susan Kolodziejczyk & Michelle Rodriguez**
The Belton Journal

On January 6, 1866, the first typeset and roll of ink were placed on paper and published for the residents of Belton and Bell County. The Belton Weekly Journal (1866), now known as The Belton Journal, is the old-

est business on record in Belton and Bell County (established in 1850) and the second oldest continuously published weekly newspaper in Texas.

In the April 21, 1966 issue, an article titled "Journal Observes 100 Years of Continuous Publication" recognized The Journal's 100th birthday and featured a

warm congratulatory telegram from Texas Governor John Connally. The writer of the article stated, "In the interest of honest reporting, the Journal must admit it was not the first newspaper in Belton, but it was the only surviving one. By the best count available, a total of 13 others existed, earning this town the repu-

tation as 'the graveyard of newspapers.'"

The founder and first publisher of The Journal was James T. Longino, who was presumably of Italian descent. His stepfather, Major Jouett Harber Davenport, joined him in the business but soon bought out Longino. The founding story of The Journal is

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detailed in the sesquicentennial edition of the article titled "The Founding Father of the Journal." Writer Matthew K. Hamilton noted that Davenport was a livestock raiser, newspaper publisher, lawyer, state senator, and Confederate military officer.

In the July 28, 2016 award-winning edition, an article titled "Publisher's Note" marked the sesquicentennial, celebrating 150 years of publication. "No person or corporation owns The Belton Journal. You own it. With the 50 cents you paid

this week, you are a part-owner of the newspaper. In 10 years, we may only be found online. Whether in print or on your phone, our job and the job of future publishers is to report what is happening in the community," said Publisher David Tuma. "I am fortunate as a businessman to have spent the best years of my life serving this community."

The paper has operated from various locations but has always been in the downtown area. Its first location was in the John Henry Building,

which still exists and is currently being restored to its former status as the 1895 Belton Opera House, located at the corner of Main and Water Street.

Most issues of The Belton Journal can be found on the City of Belton's Lena Armstrong Public Library website at beltontexas.gov. The site serves as a resource for the history of Belton, obituaries, and genealogy. However, issues from 1866 to 1869 are not available online due to fires in 1898 and 1914 that irretrievably destroyed any existing paper copies.

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