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Quality, continuity propel paint store into the future

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Exclusive Paints owner Joe Shiewitz tints a can of paint.

TORONTO – On the cusp of its 75th anniversary, Exclusive Paints bid a fond farewell to its College Avenue location and move last month to its new digs in Downsview. While the location will be different, the store's owners hope to keep the loyal customer base and perhaps even expand it.

This marks the store's fourth move. Exclusive Paints was founded in 1938 by Isadore (Izzy) Reingewertz and his wife Freda. The store's first spot was on Spadina Avenue. In 1948, Izzy chose a new spot on College.

Their daughter Esther Shiewitz remembers her father helping Jews in the community find jobs and materials as painting contractors. He would even drive them to work if they didn't have access to a car. "In those days, everyone helped each other," Esther reminisces.

Izzy proved to be very helpful to Esther, because his choice of Joe Shiewitz as an employee led to Joe and Esther's marriage. When Izzy recruited Joe in 1959, Joe was working at a gas station owned by one of Izzy's acquaintances.

Joe recalls, "My father-in-law saw me working at the gas station and said that I had to work for him, or I'd get fired."

The owner of the gas station allowed Joe to work at Exclusive Paints, where he met Esther. The two married in 1968 and have three children.

A decade later, Izzy fell ill and passed away. Before Izzy's death, Joe bought the store. Joe admits that it was a "headache" to take over the store, although it turned out well. Under Joe's ownership, the store moved down the street, from 298 College to 284 College. The new location was triple the size and offered more parking options.

Despite Exclusive Paint's success at its second College location, Joe concedes that increased competition from big box stores has made it difficult to survive. The new store in Downsview is smaller, with reasonable rent.

Cheryl, one of the three Shiewitz children, says that it's a better location.

"It's right off the highway and there's more parking," she notes.

The move to Downsview shouldn't deter too many of Exclusive Paint's loyal customers, as people come from all over the Greater Toronto Area to shop at the store.

Exclusive Paints attracts a loyal clientele because it offers something that its bigger competitors can't: perfect colour matching. Unlike stores such as Home Depot, Exclusive Paints does not use a computer to create the perfect shade. Thanks to Izzy's training, the employees at Exclusive Paints have developed a good eye for colour, and they guarantee they can match any swatch a customer brings to them. The attention to detail, coupled with personal attention and a desire to please customers, keeps shoppers coming back to Exclusive Paints.

The store's reputation and loyal customer base gives Joe hope for the future, despite the competition. Exclusive Paints seems poised to stay in the family: Joe's son Aron works there full time and his other children, Cheryl and David, pitch in frequently. The combination of quality and continuity practically ensure the store will be around well into the next century.