

Barry Athletic bids farewell after 85 years in Rockville Centre

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After 85 years of business and service to the Rockville Centre community, Barry Athletic closed its doors in January when owner Joan Hoffman decided to retire.

“It’s been an honor to be in this town,” said Hoffman, who lives in Oceanside. “Even though I don’t own a house here, I really call it my home.”

Hoffman’s father, Harry Feingold, opened the shop in 1934 and passed it down to her in 1979. He died in 2008 at 95. The company outfitted generations of Rockville Centre residents with athletic apparel and custom T-shirts. Barry Athletic also sponsored many of the village’s sports leagues over the years, including the basketball, soccer and little leagues.

After 40 years of running the business, Hoffman said she thought it was time to move on. “I never wanted to leave; this has been my whole life with my father and all,” she said. “But it’s time for a new adventure and to do something else.”

On Jan. 26, the Rockville Centre Basketball League invited Hoffman to a freshmen girls’ basketball game to thank her and her family for decades of service to the league.

“If you’re open for 85 years, you’ve done a lot of things right,” said Mike Testa, a board member for the Rockville Centre Basketball League. “One of the things they did right was giving back to community.”

Hoffman noted that she couldn’t retire until the leagues had all their apparel for the season, prompting her to wait until the end of January to call it quits. “Each of my customers that I outfit are like my babies,” she said. “I personally put numbers on the back of each shirt to make sure everything was right.”

Barry Athletic changed gears — and locations — throughout the decades. “Each time we were in a different location, the business had a different main goal,” Hoffman said.

In the early days, the shop custom-printed jackets for the New York City Housing Authority and police departments. Hoffman also recalled screen-printing Davy Crockett T-shirts at their location at 200 Merrick Road in the early 1960s. “That was our thing,” Hoffman said.

Later on, the shop moved to multiple locations on North Village Avenue and ended up back on Merrick Road before closing earlier this year. At one point about 40 years ago, Hoffman specialized in making custom tour jackets for musicians and performers, she said, notably Eddie Murphy and Twisted Sister.

“Big people have come in the shop,” she said, noting Yankee great Whitey Ford as she reflected on her long career. “You can’t even imagine. I have so many stories.”

When the FIFA World Cup came to New Jersey in 1994, Barry Athletic was the biggest Umbro soccer apparel dealer in the industry, she added.

All the while, the shop sponsored local sports teams in Rockville Centre for more than 30 years. Hoffman said that she began giving back to the community when the shop moved to a double storefront on 47 N. Village Ave. Her involvement with the village’s sports leagues was her biggest passion, she said.

“It’s a really great and personal feeling seeing kids wearing the shirts,” Hoffman added. “This was always more than a business.”