

# Bob Shallit: 'Cookie king' back in business

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Sacramento's "cookie king" is making a comeback.

We're talking about **Jerry Johnson**, who founded and ran **Uncle Jer's Cookies** for decades before closing it down three years ago.

As we reported at the time, the business crumbled under state legislation banning sales of sweets on school campuses during class hours. Almost all sales were made as fundraisers at schools across the state.

"I was devastated by it," Johnson says of closing a company that had sold as many as 3 million quarter-pound cookies a year.

But Johnson, who turns 64 in December, tells us he has responded to calls from teachers, parents and others and found a way around the "healthy snacks" law.

Instead of selling on campuses, he delivers cookies to teachers, who parcel them out to kids after school.

The students then take them home and sell them to family members and others – at a \$1 per cookie markup, using their profits for after-school activities.

Instead of making the cookies himself, as he did for years at a south Sac factory, Johnson has hired a Woodland baker to do that job.

He delivered cookies last year to about 55 schools. He expects to hit 150 this year, with projected sales of \$300,000.

Johnson says he makes only a tiny profit but loves being out in the community and helping raise money for schools.

"Everybody's looking for a legacy, something they can hang their hat on," he says. Figuring he's generated \$20 million for school programs over the years, he says: "I'm pretty proud of that."

## Heading for the Borders

The region's **Borders Books** locations are unlikely to stay vacant for long.

Commercial brokers are reporting strong interest for the half-dozen big-box sites that were vacated when the company went under earlier this year.

We hear there are letters of intent already signed on several of the sites.

Among those kicking the tires: grocery stores, clothing retailers and discounters such as **Dollar Tree**.

Add to that mix one intriguing newcomer to California: the Alabama-based **Books-A-Million** retail chain.

**Rick Martinez**, a **CB Richard Ellis** senior VP who is marketing two of the Borders sites, says the publicly traded Books-A-Million "could be making a deal" on at least one of the Sacramento-area sites.

That probably would not include the Natomas location that Martinez's firm is marketing. That site is being divided, he says, and a letter of intent is in hand for half the space.

## Polishing's his skill

There used to be a lot of shoeshine guys in Sacramento. No longer.

"It's a dying skill," says "**Chick**" **Richardson**, who may be the longest-tenured of those remaining, having worked at midtown Sacramento's **Harv's Metro Wash** for the past 20 years.

He started there "to keep busy" after retiring from a civil service job at **McClellan Air Force Base**.

Now 79, he works six days a week, serving as many as 20 customers on good days, regaling them with talk about politics and sports while buffing their boots.

Ask him about his upbringing in Mobile, Ala., and he'll tell you about some of the African American baseball legends he attended school with, including **Hank Aaron** and **Willie McCovey**.

Among those he met there: Negro league superstar **Satchel Paige**.

But it's his shoeshining skills – not his memories – that bring regulars back to his stand at Harv's, which is honoring his 20th year of work there next month with free shines for those getting car detailing work.

His secret: "I shine everybody's shoes the way I shine my own," he says. "And," he adds, "mine look good."

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