

Both Design Center stores shutting down

Dec 30, 2005

Chapel Hills location closes Saturday; other on March 29

By JIM BAINBRIDGE THE GAZETTE

After 11 years as one of Colorado Springs' best high-end furniture stores, The Design Center is quitting business in what company President Mike Demuth calls "a lifestyle decision."

The Chapel Hills store will close for good when its lease expires on New Year's Eve and the 32,000-square-foot flagship store at 750 Garden of the Gods Road will follow March 29.

A sale to clear out the company's \$3 million inventory began Thursday with prices reduced by 50 percent or more on its line of designer living room, dining room and bedroom furniture.

"It's been an emotional day," Demuth said. "We had 75-100 people lined up outside, and it's been busy all day. People keep telling us they are so sorry we are closing. We've heard that over and over and over today.

"Customers have been hugging salespeople, and there have been some tears shed."

Demuth and David Kameron, who heads a family partnership that owns the business, moved The Design Center from its longtime Tejon Street location 18 months ago, but found the upscale furniture business was increasingly hard to sustain. Kameron was out of town and could not be reached for comment.

Demuth says the company owes no money and is on sound financial footing, but he adds that money really isn't the issue.

"With all the imports flooding the market," Demuth said, "we just felt like we could no longer offer the kind of quality furniture that we wanted.

"At a certain point you ask yourself if you want to get down and dirty or stay focused on doing business the way you believe in. . . . In the end, it's a lifestyle decision."

Demuth pointed to other upscale stores — including Homestead House Furniture and Kacey Fine Furniture — that tried and failed to make a go of it here.

"Colorado Springs is just a tough market for this kind of business," Demuth said.

Demuth said he has pledged to his 23 employees that he will do everything he can to find them work in Colorado Springs and has already found jobs for five employees.

As for himself, Demuth is planning to work on some commercial real estate projects with Kameron and explore other options. The one certainty is that he will not return to the furniture business.

"I've been doing this for 26 years," he said. "I started at 19, delivering furniture, and it's time to try something new."

The building, which Kameron purchased from Western Forge for nearly \$1.4 million in October 2003, has already been listed as a lease property.

"We're not going out with our tail between our legs," Demuth said. "We're treating this like a celebration."



CAROL LAWRENCE, THE GAZETTE FILE - The Design Center at 750 Garden of the Gods Road. This location will close on March 29.