



Owner Matt Kottke and store manager Lauren Kozelka of Kottke Jewelers located at 115 N Cedar Avenue, Owatonna.

Kottke Jewelers

Kottke Jewelers has been a fixture in the Owatonna community since 1919, run by the same family for more than 100 years. There have been many ups and down in the past century, but the family business faced an entirely new situation this year in the face of COVID-19.

“The pandemic affected us much like many small family-owned retail businesses,” said Matt Kottke. “We had to close our business entirely, and then begin to reopen in a stepped-manner following recommendations by health officials. It was tough for us to see the non-locally owned big-box stores remain open during our shutdown and continue to sell jewelry and watches in their stores, as they were allowed to remain open because they also sold items deemed essential—all this, during a time when we had to close. It seemed unfair to many of us; however, we chose our employees’, customers’ and community’s safety first.”

While the store was closed to foot traffic, Kottke Jewelers offered curbside service when possible and set up private appointments when it was deemed safe. They also installed PPE services and worked to continuously clean all surfaces and touch points.

Kottke said it was gratifying to see how much the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism focused on helping retail businesses during this challenging time, especially in the heart of downtown Owatonna.

“It seemed like in recent years, their attention was more towards the larger industrial and corporate sector, and this pandemic helped shed a brighter light on the importance of the small locally-owned businesses who support the community and conversely rely on the community’s support to survive,” Kottke said.

Kottke Jewelers received one of the Chamber’s JumpStart Owatonna grants, which helped them pay bills when general revenues were down. The grant also helped with marketing efforts as Kottke Jewelers worked to connect with customers who couldn’t come inside the store.

Now, Kottke Jewelers is fully opened and back to regular business hours. Kottke said that the family feels “very positive” about the future, both for their own business and for the downtown retail area.

“We’ve enjoyed having a strong and loyal following over the years, and these customers are continuing to support us,” he said. “We look forward to serving them in the future as well. We are hopeful that when customers consider future purchases, whether it be bridal, anniversary or special occasion, that they will remember the locally owned businesses that are trying to ‘weather the storm’ and continue to be their ultimate choice to do business with.”

by Grace Brandt, special project for the People's Press

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