

# Small business big at On Main/Off Main

By Ashley Festa  
Contributing Writer

For the owners of On Main/Off Main, it's all about the customer service.

And it's "extraordinary customer service," said Bill Davis, co-owner of the alternative card shop, that has kept their customers coming back year after year.

He and business partner Oscar Camacho have co-owned the small retail store since 1983.

First, the shop was called On Main because it was situated on North Main Avenue in the Monte Vista/Laurel Heights area.

Four years later, they opened a candy shop called The Sweet Life right next door. In 2003, they condensed the two operations into one store and moved around the corner onto 120 W. Mistletoe Ave.

They didn't want to change the name of On Main for fear of confusing and losing their customer base.

But since they were no longer on Main Avenue, the name seemed inappropriate.

After a bottle of wine with friends, they had a brainstorm, and On Main/Off Main was handed its new name.

And from their attentiveness to each customer, it's clear why they would be missed.

The businessmen pride themselves on remembering the names of their regulars and offering samples of all the treats they sell in the store.

If a customer says,



Photo by Ashley Festa

Oscar Camacho (left) and Bill Davis own On Main/Off Main, a mainstay in the Monte Vista/Laurel Heights area.

'What does that taste like?' we'll say, 'Just a minute, I'll open up a box,'" Davis said. "You don't see the larger stores doing that."

There have been occasions in which a customer has called at 5:30 p.m. on the way to a birthday party and desperately in need of a gift.

"They'll say they need a tote bag with balloons on it, and we'll have it ready when they get here," Davis said.

After shopping in big-box stores so often, "Sometimes people forget what customer service is about," he added.

The owners handpick about 80 percent of the store's greeting cards, which are the most pop-

ular items.

Next, though, are the hand-dipped truffles. You'll also find books, candles, gag gifts and even a special back room that offers a selection appropriate for bachelorette parties.

"We've been listening to what our customers want," Davis said. "We learned a lot of things in 28 years."

Davis and Camacho have even served celebrities.

After taking actress Carol Burnett for enchiladas at Los Barrios one time, they presented her with a "Winter in Texas" sweatshirt, which, they say, she still owns.

They're bringing the design back this year, along with another pop-

ular print that they designed themselves.

A local businessman prints the shirts for the store. Investing local, Davis said, is crucial to keeping these types of businesses alive.

"Our slogan is 'Keep it local,'" Davis said.

And they do. Recently they held a contest to guess the weight of an enormous pumpkin in the store. The three prizes were gift cards to their store and two nearby businesses.

And if you'd like to shop online this Christmas, the owners suggest heading over to On Main/Off Main's Facebook page, where they post photographs of merchandise and list upcoming events.

"We've been listening to what our customers want. We learned a lot of things in 28 years."

— Bill Davis, On Main/Off Main co-owner

Customers are not only Facebook friends, though; they're friends in real life.

"Special customers bring back their grown children, and they recall favors from years past, like the peppermint bark that we still sell," Camacho said.

They have discontinued some items over the years. When the store moved, the owners decided to stop selling coffee. That is, until their customers started complaining.

The special blends, some of which they named after regulars, were impossible to find elsewhere.

"We had to retrieve the coffee grinder from the storeroom," Davis said.

It's that sort of dedication that has helped Davis and Camacho keep up the hard work of retail.

"If you're not willing to commit, you're not going to be successful," Davis said.

His best advice for a small-business owner: "Be true to yourself. And treat your customer how you'd want to be treated in a store."

## BRIEFS, from P6

decide which city should receive a \$1 million grant to fight hunger.

The next five cities with the highest support will receive \$100,000 each. San Antonio is included in the list of 100 communities.

## Local firm's animations in 'Avatar' documentary

The newly released "Avatar" three-disc extended collector's edition DVD and Blu-ray from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment features a special documentary titled, "Capturing Avatar."

Included is Rob Powers, vice president of 3D development at north central San Antonio company NewTek and member of the original "Malibu Five," the first five individuals to join James Cameron's team in the production of "Avatar."

The documentary shows the earliest six-legged creature animation test Powers created for "Avatar," using LightWave 3D, and Powers discusses the film's Virtual Art Department (VAD).

While working on "Avatar," Powers founded the first-ever VAD, using LightWave in the creation of virtual environmental assets for the world of Pandora in the blockbuster film.

As the first concept-animation artist working on the film, Powers used LightWave to generate the original creature rigs and test animations in his initial role as animation technical director.

Powers is currently working with NewTek's software development team to produce innovative tools and new, interactive functions that will be incorporated into future versions of LightWave.

The next major release, LightWave 10, is expected to ship soon. Visit [www.newtek.com](http://www.newtek.com) for more information.