

McDonald's on Penn Street to close

Sunday will be the final day for the city restaurant, which is shutting down due to its limited hours and lack of a drive-through, according to a franchisee.

By Tony Lucia
Reading Eagle

The McDonald's restaurant at Fifth and Penn streets is closing after more than a quarter-century at that location, an owner of the franchise announced Tuesday.

George N. Skyllas, who with his wife, Diane, has owned the business for five years, said there were problems with the location that hampered it from realizing its full potential.

"It's really a tough location," Skyllas said. "I was not able to be open the regular hours — some locations are open 24 hours a day. So I was limited there."

"Plus, there is no drive-through, and no parking. The drive-through is critical to our business."

Sunday will be the closing day, Skyllas said.

Larry Norton, McDonald's marketing director for the Philadelphia region, confirmed the closing.

The Skyllas family also owns McDonald's franchises in St. Lawrence and Temple, and Exeter, Muhlenberg, Spring and Amity townships.

Although the Skyllas family

took over the downtown franchise in 2000, McDonald's has been at that corner location since 1975.

In 1977, however, a \$1 million fire destroyed the building. It was not rebuilt until 1980, but has operated continuously since August of that year.

The building recently was purchased by Scott Homel, a Jenkintown, Montgomery County, investor whose portfolio includes office properties and shopping centers in southeast Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Homel also has purchased other key corner downtown properties: He owns 402 Penn St., the location of the former Iggy's restaurant; and a property at Sixth and Penn streets that encompasses 537 to 553 Penn and 2 to 18 N. Sixth St. Tenants there include Sneaker Villa and Vesuvio's Pizza.

Anthony J. Sambello, director of broker services for Pintzuk Brown Realty Group, Jenkintown, and a spokesman for Homel, said they are interviewing several prospective tenants, both local and national, for the soon-to-be-vacated location.

Sambello said he could not set a time frame for a new business or restaurant moving in to



Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy

the location.

"I think we'd like to get something accomplished sooner rather than later," Sambello said.

However, he said the Sovereign Bank building being built across South Fifth Street in the 400 block of Penn Street will be an enticement.

"It would be exciting to dovetail with new Sovereign building," he said. "It's a nice motivator. We look at it as probably one of the probably best corner locations in downtown Reading. That was our primary reason for purchasing

the property."

Despite the closing, Skyllas said he is not averse to opening another McDonald's in the downtown area, provided it would have drive-through lanes and longer hours.

"All the (other) stores are doing well," he said. "The whole market in the Reading area has been doing well for years now. It was just that particular site. I wish it made sense for us to hang in there."

He said all of the restaurant's 50 employees will be transferred to other locations.

"If they want a job, and most

McDonald's opened at Fifth and Penn streets in 1975. A fire damaged the building in 1977, but it has operated continuously since August 1980.

Coming Sunday

The owner of McDonald's Penn Street site bets big on downtown Reading.

do, they're going to be placed," he said.

Skyllas also said he regretted having to leave the franchise's many loyal customers behind.

"It's really unfortunate," he said. "I feel badly because some nice people came into that store."

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