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Bible Depot going strong after almost closing 12 years ago

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SUNBURY – It took a leap of faith and a sign of reassurance for Nancy Ney to take a deep breath and commit to maintaining the family business — years after she and her husband had retired and left it behind.

The Bible Depot, 122 N. Front St., Sunbury, was started in 1931 by Ney's father-in-law, James C. Ney, selling Bibles, church supplies and gifts. Nancy and her husband, David A. Ney, took over the business in 1970 and ran it for 30 years before selling it and retiring to Florida.

Unfortunately, things didn't go as planned. David passed away in 2008, Nancy returned to Pennsylvania in 2009, and one year later the new owner of the Bible Depot became ill and could no longer operate the store.

"It was either lose it completely, or try to restart it," Ney said, but she was reluctant to take on the job, this time alone. "I was 60-something, and I thought, 'No way.'"

She prayed and asked for some way of knowing she was doing the right thing. At the time, the store was somehow missing the imprinting machine that personalizes Bible covers for customers. A new one cost \$3,000 — more money than Ney could scrape together. She put in a bid of \$100 for a used one, realizing she was going ridiculously low.

"Then the owner called and said, the strangest thing happened," Ney said. "Everyone backed out of their bids."

The machine was hers, and she had her reassurance.

"That's one of the reasons I'm not afraid," she said. "I know God is with me, running the store."

She buckled down to relearn the business, but things had changed in the past 10 years.

"All I had was a calculator, a pencil and paper, and a big eraser," she said with a laugh. "Oh my, it was pitiful."

She called a supply company to request a catalog, and the representative said, "Oh, honey, we haven't had a catalog in eight years."

But she stayed with it, and over the years a number of volunteers have walked into the store and offered to help — another sign, she feels, that the store is meant to be open. She mentioned longtime volunteers Gary McNeir, Shirley Yagel, who eventually took over bookkeeping, billing and ordering Sunday School supplies, and Michelle Melachrinos, social media advertising volunteer.

"Her and Shirley and all the others are all a great part of the Valley," Melachrinos said of the Bible Depot. "They are very sensitive and caring and pray for people."

The store is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day except Sunday and Wednesday, and Ney is usually there every day, but she loves it.



"It's like family," she said. "It's a warm place to be."

The Bible Depot's top sellers include books, children's books, jewelry, plaques and Bibles.

"People like the idea that we imprint the Bibles for free," Ney said.

The store carries a line of Jewish items, including the Hebrew Bible, jewelry, menorahs and banners. Customers appreciate the DVD and audio library, where they can borrow from a selection of 1,200 movies and CDs.

Surprisingly, most of their sales are in-person versus online. Regular customers stop in for birthday and wedding gifts, boxed cards, single cards and gifts for Christmas, graduation, baptism and other special occasions. The store appeals to customers from as far as Williamsport, Ashland and Middleburg.

"If you're looking for something special, she's got a wide variety," said Ashley Fetter, salesperson at Bible Depot. "If it's something she doesn't have, she's very accommodating about finding it for you."

"I love Nancy," said Peggy Walter, whose mother often told her that Nancy's father-in-law walked across town to deliver the white Bible she wanted on her wedding day. "They're wonderful people, and they'll do anything they can to help you out."

Newer sales include large-print and even giant-print Bibles. Ney also sells Filament Bibles, which pair a print book with a digital app that can scan any page to provide maps, devotions and study notes. She's also seen more interest in inspirational items.

"A lot of people are looking for things to encourage others in their faith. A verse to remind them it's about more than this world," she said.

Whatever they're looking for, there's a good chance they'll find it at Bible Depot.

"It's one of those stores where, every time you turn a corner there's another room," Fetter said. "It's not just Bibles. It's greeting cards, checkbooks, activity books, jewelry, baby items. There's a little bit of everything here."

Saying she's thankful the doors to owning the business opened again for her, Ney smiled as she glanced at the abundance of items, and said, "You can't not enjoy selling such beautiful things."