

50 years of coffee, talk

ART'S SPA MARKS A MILESTONE

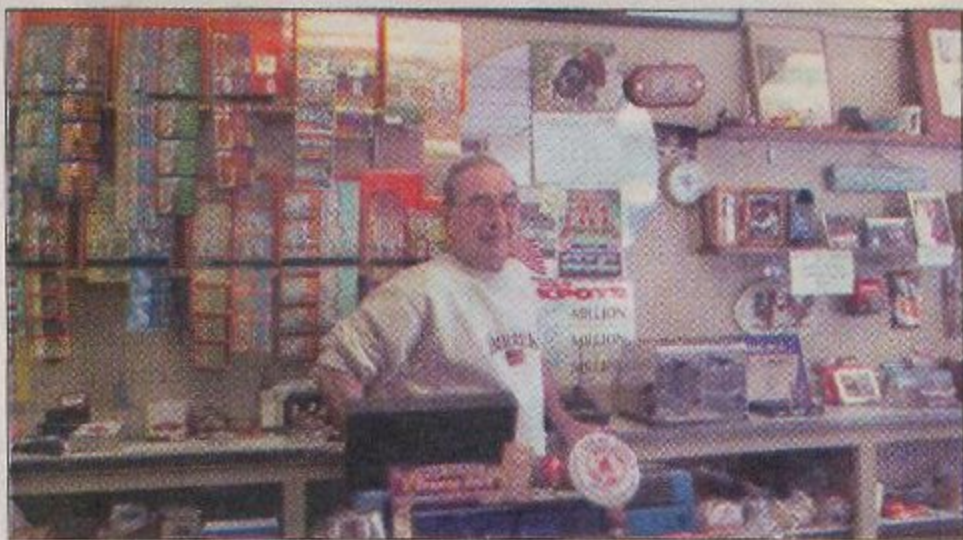
BY SHAUN MORIARTY
NEWS STAFF WRITER

SOUTH BRIDGE — It was April 20, 1957 when young Art Commito first opened the doors to Art's Variety Store — now known by regulars as Art's Spa — on South Street. At the time, it was the latest of several neighborhood coffee and grocery shops.

Today, April 20, 2007, the days of the neighborhood spa appears to be a vestige of a bygone era but Art's Spa pushes on in the same place it's always been, with Commito still behind the counter and with many faces that have spent just about every day for many years cracking jokes with one another.

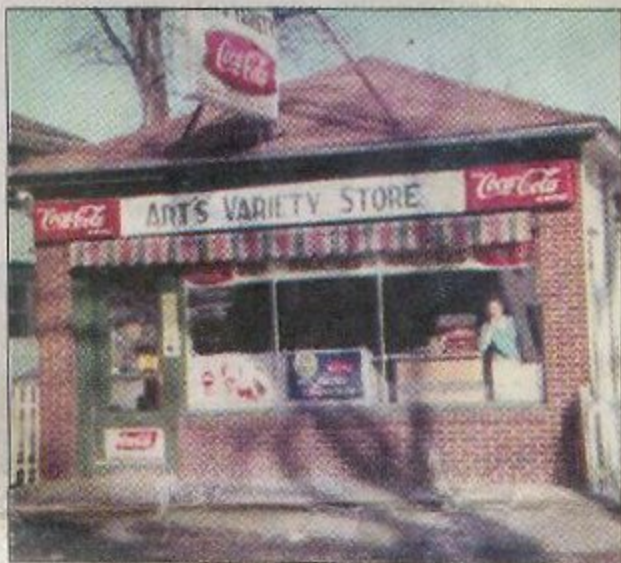
Those loyal customers have helped keep Art's Spa open for half a century.

"We've got our steady customers," said Commito, who knows all of his customers by name and what



Top, Shawn Kelley photo/Right, courtesy photo, 1961

Since it opened on April 20, 1957, Art's Variety Store, also known by patrons as Art's Spa, right, has been a South Street meeting place. Above, owner Art Commito stands behind the counter to greet customers and friends.



Art's Spa in business for 50 years

ART'S SPA

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they like in their coffee.

Sitting a couple stools down the way, Dick Sullivan, one of those loyal customers, chimed in: "Lots of VIPs here," and proceeded to note state Sen. Richard Moore and Worcester County Sheriff Guy W. Glodis have had a \$1 cup of coffee at Art's.

Jeanette Curboy, who has been a regular fixture at Art's since 1957, said she has always enjoyed coming in each day.

"I like it," Curboy said. "You make a lot of friends here and chat."

She added: "It's a little place to get away."

Sullivan added he could be found at Art's "every day," and admitted it was his second visit of the day.

"This is an original," Sullivan continued. "If you want to get your butt roasted, this is the place to come."

Ultimately, Art's Spa is a holdover from a bygone era. Just about all of the old variety stores with a coffee counter have disappeared.

"The trend in the old days, there were a lot of convenience stores," Commito said. "Small convenience stores are gone."

He continued: "Right now, most of your small stores are on their way out. These types of stores are gone."

While Art's Spa has survived where some other variety stores and coffee shops have not, it has experienced changes.

"We're basically down to coffee," Commito said. "The grocery store part of any small store is gone."

While the groceries are gone, Art's Spa is certainly much more than just coffee.

Customers come in to grab the newspaper – and talk about the various local news stories – and can chew on some toast, grab a magazine, pick up some batteries, take home some candy

or snort to their kids or grand, or try their luck with lottery or a scratch ticket.

Cono said that while he's had a few big scratch ticket winners over the years such as \$20,000 – one unidentified customer was able to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Art's Spa early when he won \$1 million on a "Set For Life" scratch ticket.

Now after 50 years behind the counter, Commito said it's just about time him to cash in.

"It's getting near the end," said.

"When somebody wants it, we sell it," Commito said. "We're the whole package."

Regardless of when that day comes, he will always look back fondly on his home-away-from-home and the place that has supported him for decades.

"Had my three kids through college," Commito said. "Helped my two grandchildren through college."

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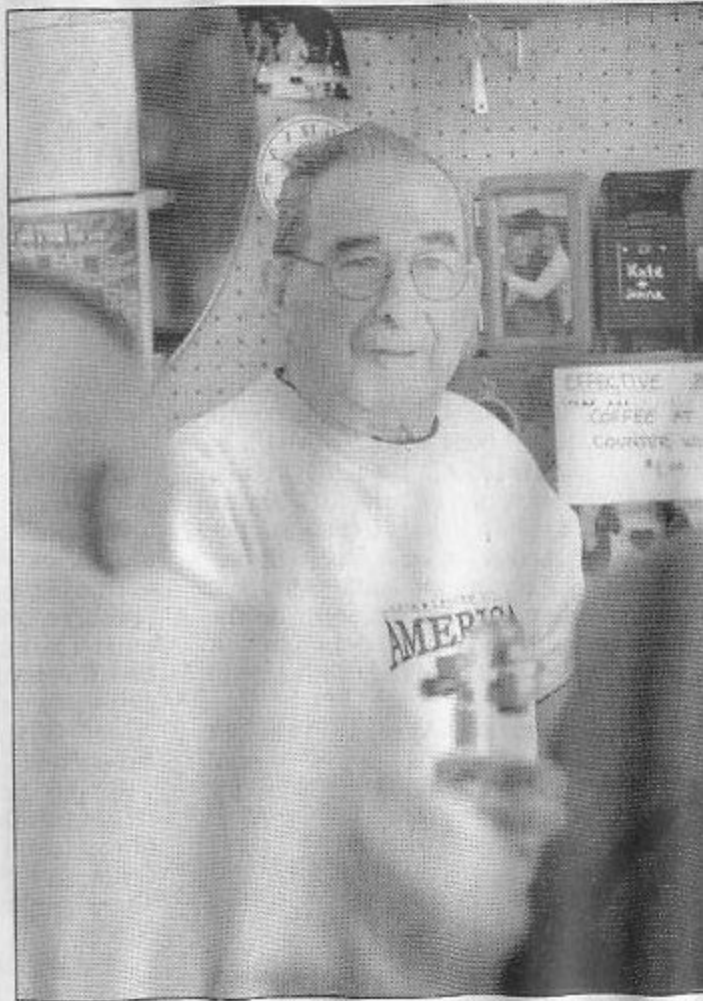
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– Jeanette Curboy, a regular customer at Art's Variety since it opened in 1957, on why she enjoys her daily visit

his family are thankful to the store's many loyal customers and friends for making the journey to 50 years a joyful reality.

Art's Spa, located on South Street, is open 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 5:30 a.m. to noon Saturday and Sunday.

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Shawn Kelley photo

Art Commito talks with some of his regular customers at the counter of Art's Variety yesterday.