

Peterson Shoes:

Customer Service is the Perfect Fit

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Welcome to Minnesota's Best Shoe Store! At Peterson Shoes, you'll find a stand-out, all-women customer service team, Certified Pedorthists providing custom orthotics, and a cobbler with 40 years of experience. This fourth-generation family business has been a staple to the Anoka, Minn. community since the 1800s, and clearly has carried on its legacy over time as it recently was recognized as the best shoe store in the state by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* in 2021.

Located on Main Street in the heart of downtown Anoka, Peterson Shoes is a single-location, 5,000 sq.-ft. store offering popular brands such as **New Balance**, **Haflinger**, **Birkenstock**, **KEEN**, **Aetrex**, **Brooks**, **Smartwool** and **Superfeet**. Twelve years ago, the retailer expanded to occupy the entire building in which they are located and added a section with fun tops, jewelry and purses to complement their footwear. Store manager Dawn Purtle says, "Locals often stop in to see what fun, new clothes we have added in this section. While we're in the back room getting shoes for customers, this area of the store gives them something to do as an add-on while they wait."

Dawn, who handles customer service, ordering, buying, and more, is one of the many family members involved

in the Peterson Shoes business. Her mother-in-law, Sandra Purtle, currently owns the store and is the daughter of the late Melvin and Estelle Peterson, who originally established the Peterson brand. Melvin and Estelle are believed to have originally purchased the store in 1940. Prior to that, the store was known as Gillespie Shoes, which had been the longest-running shoe store at one loca-



was closing, they purchased it and created Peterson Shoes. Sandra's daughter, Michelle, has worked at Peterson's

Of NSRA, Dawn says, "They've been a great asset. We've used everything from their credit card processing to their shipping partnership, and we're looking into signing up for Fitted for online sales."

tion in Minnesota. Melvin's dad worked for Gillespie's as a shoemaker, and when Melvin and Estelle learned the business

for over 35 years. Dawn's daughter has recently taken up a role, and even her granddaughter makes frequent appear-



Well-organized shoe displays greet customers at the front of the store.

ances. “We’re an all-female staff – not by design, just by coincidence,” says Dawn. “The ladies who work here are fabulous.”

Customer Service Helps Win Award

Peterson Shoes’ customer service played a key role in earning their Best Shoe Store award. “We are what people remember from years ago, when you’d come into a business, be greeted, and receive one-on-one customer service,” Dawn explains. “We walk customers through the process of measuring them, getting them fitted, and understanding their issues. We help to problem-solve and figure out the best footwear for a customer’s needs. Whether they need a shoe for their job, to alleviate planter fasciitis, or simply to go to a wedding and look good while feeling comfortable, we find the perfect fit. We just had a first-time customer send us a letter about how struck she was by how patient and helpful our staff was. This is exactly the experience we want our customers to have. We want them to rave about us, to come back, and to tell their friends. We treat our customers like family because our customers are why we’re here.”

Staff is the Store’s Greatest Advantage

Many of Peterson Shoes’ customers have been visiting the store for decades. “We have customers who we used to put baby shoes on when they were little, back when we carried children’s shoes, who now come in with their own families. This place is rooted in our town’s community. We’re involved in the Chamber of Commerce, town events, and charitable giving. But, overall, what we’re really known for is treating people how they want to be treated,” Dawn proclaims. “Once people visit us, they’re hooked. We have out-of-state customers who have moved or visited us once with friends who make our store a destination when they travel to the area.”

Peterson Shoes has two Certified Pedorthists on staff – owner, Sandra, and her daughter, Michelle, who are trained to evaluate people’s feet and to provide the best orthotics for resolving foot issues. The retailer carries many over-the-counter orthotic brands, including Superfeet and **PowerStep**. However, they are unique in being the only store in Minnesota



The sales staff played a key role in the store earning its Best Shoe Store award from the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.



Bill Oestreicher, a fourth-generation cobbler, runs his shoe repair and custom orthotic business out of the store.



A photograph of Peterson Shoes from 1941.

that also carries Quadrastep – a line of prefabricated orthotics which Dawn says “are as close to custom as you can get” but without the cost or a needed prescription (in Minnesota, a doctor’s prescription is required for custom orthotics). It’s a great solution for people who haven’t been able to find relief from over-the-counter orthotics. “They are a life-changer for some people. Our team becomes detectives – we figure out what will alleviate someone’s pain, help them do their jobs better, care for their families better, and overall have a better quality of life. We’ve had people break down and cry because they’re finally comfortable again, and it’s very gratifying to help people in this way,” remarks Dawn.

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Another Peterson Shoes differentiator is fourth-generation cobbler, Bill Oestreicher, who runs his shoe repair business inside of Peterson's store. When the Peterson team needs custom orthotics for a customer, Bill is able to fabricate them on site. With over 40 years of experience under his belt, Bill repairs everything from shoes and purses to hockey

bags and baseball gloves. "People bring in all sorts of unusual things – Bill even fixed clown shoes one day! He's really good at his job and we're lucky to have such a great asset," explains Dawn.

Everyone in the Peterson Shoes building works together to make a great team. "Our staff is our greatest advantage – they're unsung heroes. Without them, our customers wouldn't be coming back. Our philosophy for treating our staff is the same as what we do with

our customers. Our staff becomes family (if they aren't already!) and we focus on creating a fun environment and job that also fits in with their family life. We make sure our staff has the time to do what's important in their lives – and it seems to be working, as we do not have a lot of turnover. The best piece of retailing advice I can give is, whether with your staff, vendors, or customers, treat people how you want to be treated. This will always come back to you," says Dawn. ■