

## Champion Shoe Sales & Repair:

# Dad-Daughter Duo Maintains a Family Legacy

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Gina Giunta Fick, owner of Champion Shoe Sales & Repair, has retailing in her blood. Her grandfather moved from Sicily to the United States and founded Champion Shoe Sales & Repair as a shoe repair business in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania in 1941. Gina's dad, Angelo, went on to take over the family business in 1957 and ran it successfully before he passed it on to his daughter in 2014. Angelo considers himself "semi-retired" as he still comes into the store every day to do some selling – he's a staple of the Champion experience and customers still come in expecting to see him. Plus, Gina says, "I'm still learning from my dad every day."

Gina didn't always plan to take over the business. She went to college for musical theater, but one day it hit her that after being raised in the shoe retailing business, continuing the family legacy as a third-generation owner was truly her passion.

## Not Just Shoe Sales

Today, Champion Shoe Sales & Repair is still a full-service shoe repair shop focusing on orthopedic work. In addition to Gina and Angelo, another of the business' staple employees is certified pedorthist and craftsman, Ken, who has been on staff for over 30 years. He heads the repair side of the business and is

always busy fulfilling orthopedic work from doctors' prescriptions. The business also does repair work on shoes, boots (work boots in particular, as many customers buy expensive boots they fall in love with and don't want to replace them), jackets and purses. It can be hard to find a reliable, local shoe repair business these days – so difficult, in fact, that people who don't live in the area ship their repairs to Gina's store. These long-distance customers email Gina a photo of the problem, she prices out the repair, and then the customers ship in their shoes and Gina's team fixes them and sends them back. Long-distance shoe repair orders increased during the pandemic. "We have people who were customers for years that have moved away and they're still shipping us shoe repair jobs," Gina reports. "It's because we're really good at what we do."

In addition to shoe repair services, Champion Shoe also has a retail side of the business, specializing primarily in comfort retail with lines like **revere**, **ECCO** and Taos in addition to men's and women's work boots. The typical clientele is older, at least age 30 and up, but beginning to skew younger as Gina brings in younger product offerings. Gina's comfort shoe business was doing well, but by talking with customers she identified a hole in the market that needed to be filled. Aside from box stores in the area, Champion Shoe was the only shoe retailer around, and there was nowhere in the area for people to get quality athletic footwear and apparel.

## Customers' Needs Inspired Second Store

Gina's customers' need for a brick-and-mortar athletic footwear store inspired



Angelo Giunta and his daughter,  
Gina Giunta Fick, in the showroom  
at Champion Shoe Sales & Repair.



**Champion In Motion, Giunta Fick's fitness boutique, opened in 2020 – just before the pandemic hit.**



**Champion Shoe Sales & Repair longstanding reputation is a key to its success.**

her to open a new store, Champion in Motion, in 2020. "I am fitness minded myself, and one of my passions is to stay healthy and keep moving. I'm in constant motion, which is what inspired the name for the new store. The name just sort of fell naturally out of my mouth. It's all my passions put together – footwear, fitness, and fashion – to create a fitness boutique for men and women. It's like an extension of me," Gina explains. Located right next door to Champion Shoe Sales & Repair, this new store offers athletic footwear and apparel from popular brands including **Brooks**, **On**, **New Balance**, **Saucony** and **361**. A week-and-a-half after the new store opened, COVID-19 hit, and Gina was forced to close everything. However, she still did sales online, and when she was able to open her doors again business quickly took off, especially with everyone working from home and focusing more on outdoor activities and exercise. "We have a great reputation in town from what we've done all these years, which has allowed us to quickly grow business at Champion in Motion," Gina concludes. "Today, we are fortunate to be thriving."

### Focus on the Customer

The retailer's long-standing reputation has played a key role in their success. The same family has been in business

since 1941 and has always been known for their customer service. Champion Shoes is a sit-and-fit operation, so they take the time to get to know their customers and remember them when they return. "I just had a lady come in and say, 'I sent several people to you because I knew you'd take good care of them,'" Gina references. "We know our shoes inside and out and we know feet. I'm a Certified Therapeutic Shoe Fitter, and we have Ken, our Pedorthist, on staff. We make sure what we're doing is the best thing for the customer. We're not just selling to sell."

### Getting the Word Out

While Champion Shoes' customer service brings shoppers to the store on its own, they also use a few key marketing strategies to drive traffic. The retailer is successful advertising in the local newspaper, both in print and online. They also leverage Facebook and Instagram ads to promote big sales. In addition, they text customers once per month through their POS system with sales information which always brings large amounts of people to shop in store. Gina and Angelo also increase their visibility by being very active in the local community. They do shoe repairs for those in need and give shoes to their local church to take on mission trips to

distribute to those who may not have shoes on their feet. They also donate shoes to a local branch of Soles4Souls, an organization that distributes shoes and clothing to those in need around the world.

Gina says her biggest challenges with the business are staying up to date and competing with online retailers, especially as the pandemic has hurt in-store traffic and increased the number of people shopping online. To combat this, the retailer offers sales specifically focused on getting customers to shop in-store. Gina leverages competitive pricing and also offers free shipping and special ordering through her website to remain relevant. "It's also important to make sure our customers don't feel obligated when they shop with us. We do offer returns when necessary to ensure we're keeping customers happy," Gina says. To stay up to date with product offerings, Gina attends the Atlanta Shoe Market twice per year and is also very active on social media. In addition, she networks and attends seminars, shows and events through the National Shoe Retailers Association to stay connected in the industry. "The NSRA seminars are extremely informative, and I take information back to my stores immediately and put it to use," Gina says.

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For the brand's Champion In Motion store, Gina is constantly talking to her fitness-minded friends and asking them about their favorite products. She also asks her audience questions on Facebook to make sure she's carrying products to meet their needs. When she travels, Gina visits other shoe stores to see what is trending as she always wants to be learning from other retailers, too.

### Continuing the Family Legacy

Gina and her family's methods of combating these challenges have been successful. Angelo's best piece of retailing advice is to stay consistent – with everything from your hours and product offerings to how you treat customers. "It's important to always be true to what you do," he says.



**In 2014, Gina Giunta Fick became the third-generation owner of Champion.**

"The best part of working with my dad is I never stop learning from him. We've had our challenges, as roles have been reversed – he was the boss, and now I am. However, we still respect each other and have so much fun," Gina recalls. "I have a lot of 'big shoes' to fill, but I know I can keep our business true to its legacy. I love shoes. I love that I can come to work every day and work



**Angelo Giunta took over the family business in 1957, and still comes into the store every day.**

with a wonderful group of employees who have been with us a long time and who feel like family. I get to work with my family every day and help people. We're not in this business just to sell shoes, we're in it to help people stay on their feet literally and figuratively. It's my dream to continue the legacy my family started all those years ago." ■

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