

A Taste of the Sweet Life

Rickeldoris serves candy in Jerome for 3 decades

BY VYTO STARINSKAS
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"They feel good when they come in, and they feel better when they walk out"

Artis Roque

Artis Roque in front of the Rickeldoris Candy and Popcorn Company at 367 Main St. in Jerome on Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023. (VVNyto Starinskas)

JEROME - Visitors trickle in like kids in a candy store. Customers' eyes pop wide open as though they have just struck gold.

Actually, they are discovering golden nugget bubble gum, chocolate gold coins, Charleston Chew bars, jelly beans, black licorice, candy cigarettes, Atomic fireballs, Neccos, rock candy and even gourmet-flavored popcorn.

"Nostalgia" is what has kept customers coming back to the Rickeldoris Candy and Popcorn Company on Main Street in Jerome for the past 30 years, owner Artis Roque said.

"A lot of people say it feels like an old-time candy store," she said. It brings them back to their childhood no matter what part of the country they are from.

"They feel good when they come in, and they feel better when they walk out."

One of the oldest businesses in one of the oldest towns in Arizona, Rickeldoris moved from its former location across from the House of Joy to its current store in the Historic Sullivan Apartments building on Main Street in September 2022.

The retro candy store was started by Roque's mom, Bertha Rabago 29 years ago when she moved back to Jerome and bought a house.

Her grandfather worked the mines in Jerome in the 1920s, and her uncle Roberto Rabago wrote the popular book "Rich Town Poor Town" about Jerome miners.

Roque said she grew up in California and visited the candy store as a girl. She became an X-ray technical, and her husband, Tom Blosser, worked in the pool business. But they moved back to Jerome 16 years ago to work in the Verde Valley and at the candy store on weekends.

Her mom ran the candy store until she was 83 years old, Roque said. She passed away eight years ago, and Roque and her husband took over the store. "So we kept it in the family."

Her mother ran the store until the day she died and was "sharp as can be," Roque said.

"She loved the candy store," her daughter explained. "She loved having her own business, she loved talking to people. She wanted to work."

Roque keeps a small memorial to her mother with photos in the store for return customers who love to talk about her mom.

The memorial is at the base of a long wooden staircase built by master-carpenter Richard Martin, who rebuilt the 1917 building and sold it to Roque last September.

There are customers who came here as kids, and now come back as parents and want to show their own kids the candy store they used to go to, she said. And they remember her mother.

The store also carries all kinds of gourmet truffles (they go well with wine), sugar-free chocolates, rice crispy cakes, marzipan and espresso beans. To wash it down they have nostalgic soft drinks like sarsaparilla, cream soda, Bazooka gum, prickly pear, Martian Poop, and Zombie Brains.

Originally it was a meat market, she said. It fell into disrepair inside, so Martin built a whole four-story structure within the outside brick structure.

"Richard Martin did an excellent job," she said.

Roque saw the opportunity to keep her mother's legacy alive. "By owning the building, being it's ours, the candy store is always going to be here."

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