

Family ties help Peters Billiards get through some tough breaks

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STAFF WRITER

When Greg Peterson was in eighth grade, he went to Peters Billiards and bought the parts he needed to assemble a pool table. Little did he know, less than a decade later, he would buy the business from founder Ken Peters, a friend of Greg's father's, and watch it grow into the next millennium.

Peterson sold the pool table almost immediately after he built it, and throughout high school and college, helped Peters by locating, buying, restoring and selling antique pool tables. Peterson, who has had a love for woodworking since middle school, took over the business in 1972 when he was 22 and fresh out of college. Since then, the business has expanded steadily from selling only pool tables to selling enough furnishings to fill an entire game room: lighting, couches, barstools, artwork, foosball, home-entertainment centers, you name it. Peters Billiards is now the largest single-store game-room supplier in the five-state area.

Of the company's 45 employees, more than one-third are family members, including Peterson's wife and store co-owner, Carol, and three daughters, Sarah, Leah and Krista, who work in sales. Many of the employees who aren't family are longtime friends.

"There's at least 15 people that have been with us 20 years or more," Peterson said. "We're really a close group. I can honestly say I enjoy coming to work in the morning."

Carol Peterson said the family ties are one of the main reasons the business has been so successful.



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Greg and Carol Peterson have owned, and been expanding, Peters Billiards in Minneapolis since 1972.

"That thread that runs through makes us strong," she said.

"[Our staff] know how to treat customers and they are loyal as can be," Greg Peterson added.

St. Paul resident David Wicker has been shopping at Peters Billiards for more than a decade and said the employees' friendliness and

knowledge have kept him coming back.

"They're just head and shoulders above their Twin Cities competition," Wicker said.

Despite the store's success, it hasn't always been fun and games for the Petersons, who have had to deal with their share of obstacles over the years.

PETERS BILLIARDS

President and co-owner: **Greg Peterson**
Founded: **1957 by Ken Peters, bought by Petersons in 1972**
Employees: **45, nearly 1/3 family members**
Revenue: **\$7 million to \$10 million**
Web site: **www.petersbilliards.com**

An electrical fire in November 1997 destroyed much of the building and forced Peters Billiards to close for remodeling. The company opened a temporary location a week later to handle the peak holiday retail season.

"The whole store was full of black smoke. We were lucky we had space a couple blocks away," Peterson said, adding that they managed to post reasonable holiday sales, despite the lost time.

The store wasn't safe yet, however. In 2003, the Petersons found out the state of Minnesota was condemning their property to make way for the Interstate 35W/Highway 62 Crosstown Commons reconstruction project.

"It wasn't the first time we'd heard about it," he said. "They'd been talking about it for 20 years. Some of the plans took our building, some didn't. But the final one did."

In February 2006, the state demolished Peters Billiards in what may have been a blessing in disguise. Last September, the Petersons opened a new 37,000-square-foot facility — three times the size of the former store, and just 27 feet to the west. The increase in size has allowed them more creativity in displaying their huge stock of pool tables and other



SUBMITTED ART

Left: Peters Billiards in 1975
Above: Peters Billiards in 2006

game-room furnishings.

Carol said the state was willing to work with her and her husband to find a way for them to stay at the same location.

"We'd been in the community so long, and the neighborhood was behind us, so the state was willing to make some compromises," she said.

Greg credits the store's success in part to its location.

"Minneapolis is a great metro market, and we couldn't be in a better spot," he said. "We're right off one of the busiest highways in the state, and even if people just drive by and see us for years without stopping in, someday, when they need something for a game room, they'll know where to go."

Michael Hubert, chief financial officer for Olhausen, a national pool table brand, said Peters Billiards is one of his favorite accounts. It also happens to be the largest single-store dealer of Olhausen tables in the world.

"I think the biggest thing that has made Peters successful is that they take care of their customers," Hubert said. He has had a working relationship with the Petersons since 1985. "People have a really good experience when they shop there. They like the people, they like the lack of pressure and they like the quality of product."

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