

## **Sam Harris Uniforms**

### **Est. 1910**

Sam Harris Uniforms was started by Solomon "Sam" Harris in downtown Peoria in 1910. Originally a dry goods store, it was in the 1930s that Harris started to carry uniforms. S. Harris, as the store was often known, was passed on to Reuben Jacobs who ran the store for 56 years. The store was known for Western wear in addition to police, fire, postal and medical uniforms. In 1990, the store was purchased by Janie Dennhardt and taken over by Janie's son, Todd, and his wife, Karla, in 2007.

Customer service has been a hallmark of the company since the beginning, said Karla Dennhardt. "We do our own embroidery," said Karla, noting that two full-time seamstresses are part of the 10-person staff. "We can do most alterations while customers wait," which has kept some customers coming back for over 50 years.

The store recently expanded to meet the needs of Peoria School District's new dress code with 11,500 square feet devoted to uniforms.

Outside of Chicago, only two other companies in Illinois offer similar services. This enables Sam Harris Uniforms to meet the needs of customers in a 100-mile radius. Various emblems, insignias and buttons carry the names of communities from across central Illinois. Going through boxes the Dennhardts keep in the office reveals some of Peoria's past, with old insignias from banks, telephone companies and operations like Producers' Dairy (now Prairie Farms).

Todd has worked at the store since he was 15 years old. "There's a real diversity to uniforms these days," he said. While bowling shirts are making a comeback, culinary attire is now on the rise, he said, with the growth of Illinois Central College's culinary school. A service-oriented enterprise, they carry more than uniforms: "We sell everything but the gun," Karla said, referring to police gear that includes holsters and handcuffs. Putting customers first, Sam Harris Uniforms is a company that "stocks deep for the long run,"