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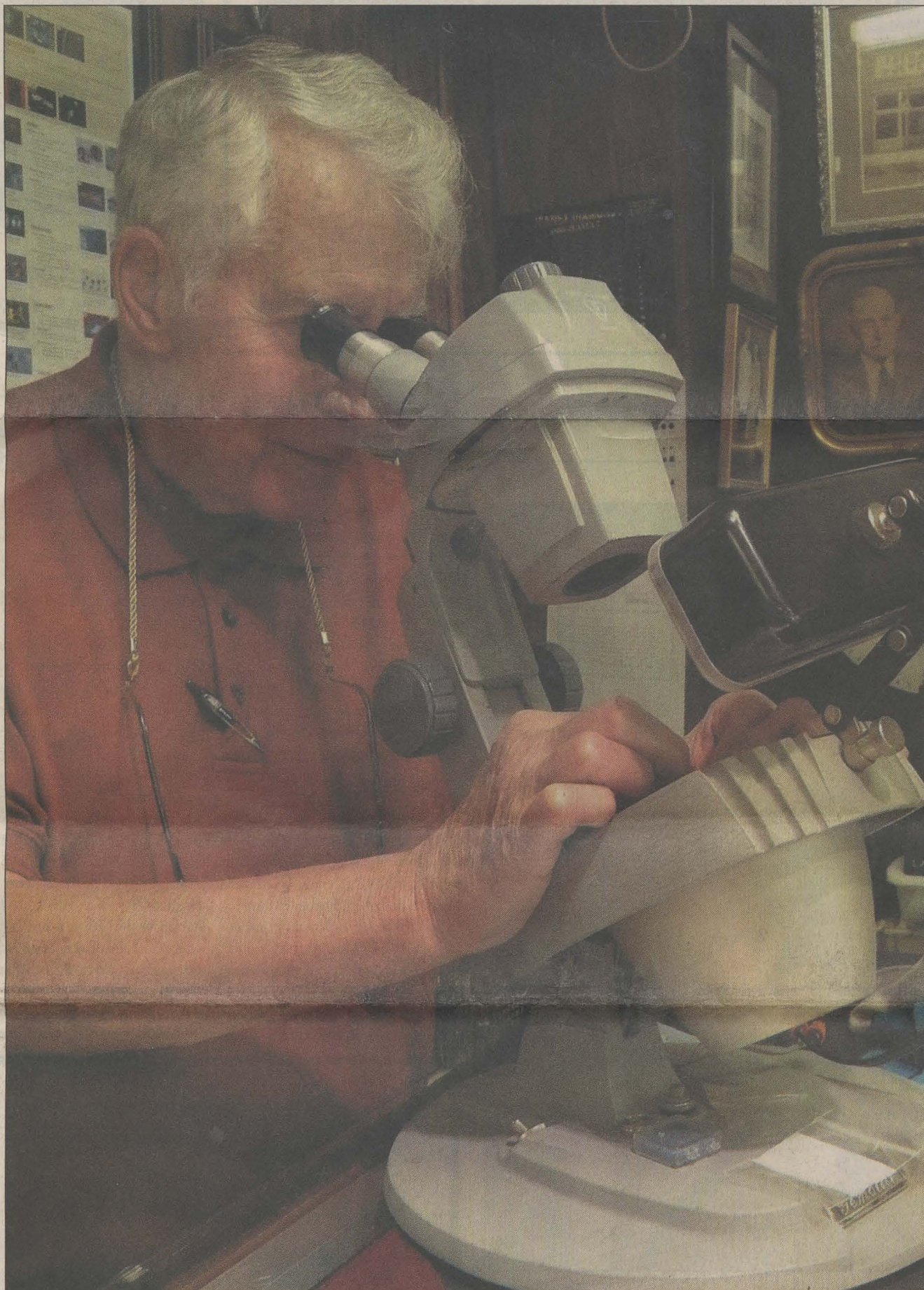
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More than a *Century of Service*

By Adriana Marshall
Correspondent

The past 115 years have brought many changes, but one local business has managed to essentially remain the same as when its doors were first opened.

Leonard's Jewelers, located at 221 N. Main St., Mount Airy, has been open since 1893, making it the longest continuously running business in the city.

As owner Walter Leonard Jr. related last week his parents, Walter D. Leonard Sr. and his wife, Alice, had bought the business from his uncle and, with rent at \$250 a month during the Great Depression, started looking for a more affordable building.

After finding one for just \$75 a month, it became infested with termites and another location was sought. That time, in 1943, Walter Sr. brought along his son to check out a building just down the street.

At the time, the shop was full of women folding bandages for soldiers in World War II. Location wasn't a problem after that and the business remains in the building to this day.

Along with being the longest-running business in Mount Airy, the store was also the first to have air conditioning and the first jewelry store in town to have a diamond lab for testing and checking stones.

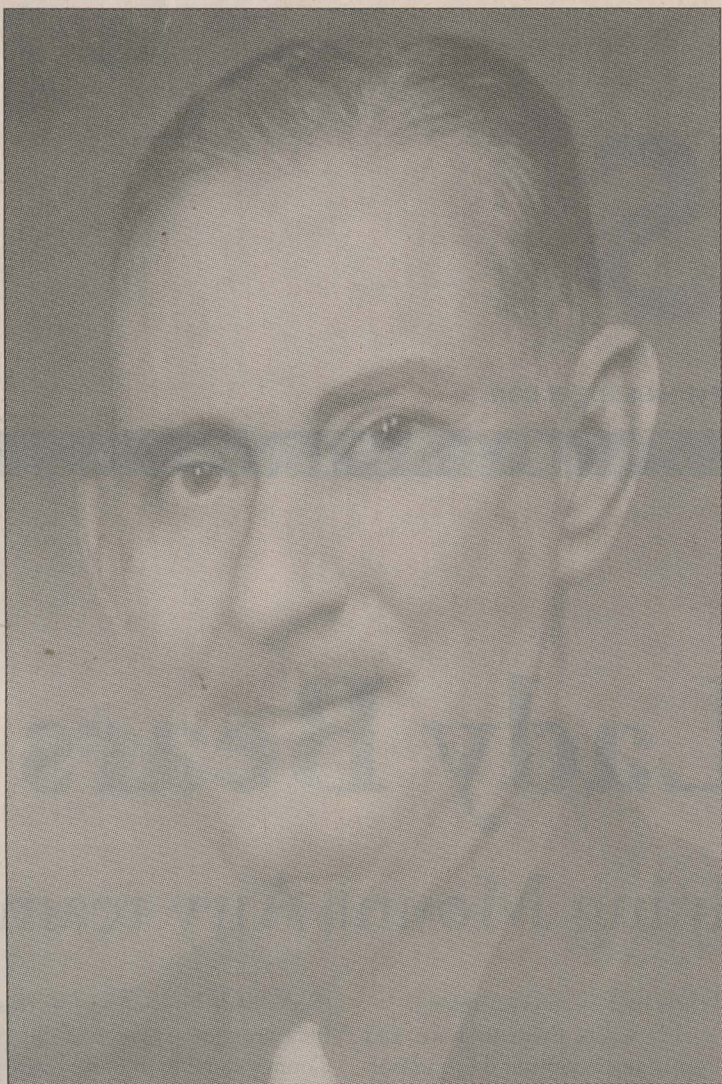
Currently the store sells diamonds, gold, watches, bridal gifts and also does repairs and offers free cleanings. Walter Jr., the only child of Walter Sr. and Alice Leonard, has worked at the store for 55 years.

After graduating from The Citadel and serving in the Army, Walter Jr. was reluctant to join the family business, wanting to "stay with Uncle Sam," he said. "All my family back to my grandfathers have been jewelers." He didn't want to become a jeweler and was looking for

Walter Leonard Jr. checks a stone for quality and imperfections.

Adriana Marshall/The Messenger

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A portrait of Walter Leonard Sr. hangs in the jewelry store.

Jeweler

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something else, but at the urging of his mother was brought into the business.

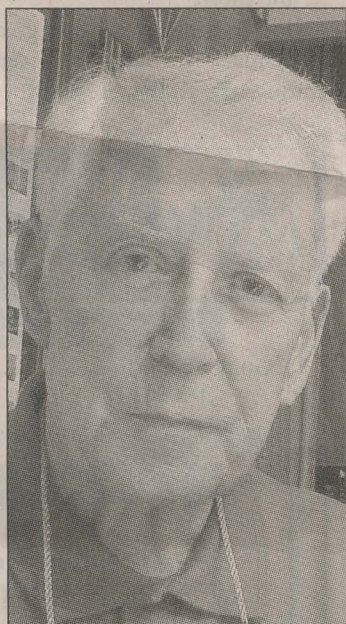
At 79, Walter Jr. goes into work Monday through Saturday — except Thursdays — from 9:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. He works with his three daughters and has a son in the jewelry business as well.

He admits that business isn't always bustling, but that an easy fix would be if more people in Mount Airy would trade with hometown merchants. The most active time of the year is at Christmas.

Throughout his 55 years at the store he has seen dramatic changes, as well as disappointing scams that come with the jewelry business.

"It's a fun thing, but it's not a fun thing," he said. In years past, he enjoyed what he called the more personal "triangle dealing" in which three people were involved — the jeweler, the buyer and the lucky recipient of the jewelry.

The store has three diamond scopes used to meticulously check stones for classification and faults. Along with equip-



Walter Leonard Jr.

ment, Leonard has also amassed a small library of research materials. "There's a lot of studying," he said of the jewelry business and being able to correctly identify all the aspects of a diamond or other jewels.

Leonard's knowledge of the industry could be a reason customers prefer shopping at his store instead of other larger jewelry outlets, but, he said, "I like to think it's because of honesty and integrity."