

SHOE

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are 10 families in the shoe business who've existed over 50 years."

Rick is also a licensed pedorthist, a sort of pharmacist for people with special shoe needs. He works with doctors to find the right footwear for their patients, especially diabetic ones, whose Medicare plans cover the cost of the shoes.

Snyderman stopped to take a call during the interview: a doctor's office asking if he could bring some sample shoes over



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO
Snyderman Shoe store in Fort Myers.



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The Snyderman family owns New Balance of Fort Myers and Snyderman's Shoes, which carries many other brands like Doc Martins, Crocs and Teva Sandals.



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Bob Snyderman moved to Fort Myers in 1979 to continue the family business started by his father in Lakewood, N.J. in 1952.

for tests, before they start recommending them to patients. It's one of the ways the family business is connected to the community. Back to school sales are also a big boost, as are the recurring tides of snowbirds, he said. With his loyal customer base and the busy winter season, sales have been on the upswing.

"Season's been good," Bob said. "I see it here. I see it at the waiting lines at restaurants around town."

The Red Sox, who began their first day of spring training in Fort Myers last Friday, also bring the northern crowds with them, many of whom are return customers. Most are also familiar with the New Balance brand, Snyderman said, which is a Boston-based company. Snyderman's Shoe Plaza contains one of 140 New Balance venues around the country, and the number one in sales in the Southeast.

Snyderman works closely with the New Balance company and is a voice in their future production plans. He tells them what customers are saying, and gets a first look at new shoe prototypes, some of which won't be on the shelves until 2010. One of the market's greatest challenges,

he said, is keeping up with trends.

"That's one thing we're always keeping our eyes out for," he said. "There's always something new. Technologies are changing all the time...It's extremely competitive, especially in the athletic business."

For example, shoe companies are working to figure out how to keep baby-boomers on their feet longer, by creating footwear that alleviates knee problems.

"One of the things about New Balance is they respect your opinions," he said. "And I'm very vocal, and they like that. I tell them, 'This is what my customers are telling me.'"

Those are the people he sells shoes to everyday, like Bloodsworth. The Snydermans, Bob and Rick, work the showroom floor on a daily basis. They said their loyal clientele have come to know them, and some of their employees, as friends.

Sales rep Jacob Connor, 21, was kneeling down to measure a woman's foot near a wall filled with New Balance running shoes.

"Never a dull moment," he said. "There's nobody we can't find shoes for, we'll always fit you in something." ■

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