

PONTIAC DAILY LEADER

[Link to Article](#)

Hampton opens its doors, Encore Shoppe to close theirs

As the saying more-or-less goes: “when a door opens, another closes.” This had meaning beyond a figurative usage Friday, when the new Hampton Inn — a colossal, modern structure just off I-55, acting as an attractive lure near a major highway teeming with tourists and travelers passing through — quietly opened at 9 a.m.

Later on that day, the Encore Shoppe, a favorite among local residents for its discounted, gently-used clothing and household goods, announced its eventual closure, effective Sept. 1.

The three-story hotel, a project first announced in the summer of 2015, is nothing if not impressive: 79 rooms, a 24-hour business center, a heated indoor pool, complimentary breakfast for guests, a fitness center and gym, Wi-Fi, a laundry area, a treat shop and so on.

Kyle Burton, the Hampton Inn’s general manager, felt that Hampton, a franchise subsidiary of Hilton Worldwide Holdings, was a brand that could draw in some hefty business for the city.

“Hampton is a nationally known brand,” he said. “There’s over 2,000 of them ... I think the loyalty is the biggest thing; when you come to a Hampton’s, you know what to expect. You know you’re going to get a clean room, breakfast, Wi-Fi and friendly service. And I think that’s huge: service can make or break you, really. Service is important.

“We want to provide the best experience, and we want all our guests to be happy when they leave.”

Burton noted that Hampton’s had worked closely with Ellie Alexander, director of Pontiac Tourism, so that she could provide guests to town with information about what Hampton’s and the other hotels had to offer so they could make a decision that suited their needs.

“There’s a lot of tourism going on here, with Route 66 and all,” the general manager added. “I think it’s going to boost Pontiac a little bit and get lots of guests. Starting off, the first couple of days we might be slow, but once word gets

out that we're open, the Hampton brand itself is an awesome brand. So I think we're going to be a great addition to Pontiac."

It was a different story entirely in downtown Pontiac, as the Encore Shoppe, a popular hub of bargain goods since 1971, announced its closure. In addition to low-cost clothing, the shop — its own subsidiary of sorts of Futures Unlimited — was a training program, providing services and working experience for adults with disabilities.

Patty Haberkorn, Futures' assistant executive director, said the parent organization had been looking closely at the Encore Shoppe for many months while making a determination.

"While we have used it as a training program, it hasn't always been a break-even entity or endeavor," she said. "At this point in time, we are just not able to sustain a program where we can't absorb the losses that we've been having at the Encore Shoppe."

Haberkorn noted that the state's chaotic budget situation, which has previously hurt special service organizations like Futures Unlimited, did not necessarily impact the decision to close the Encore Shoppe. However, she did note that the "state has not increased rates to the agency in almost a decade, which makes it harder to absorb anything with a potential loss to it."

Futures Executive Director Karen Donovan said that the Encore Shoppe was "just a small piece of what our agency," typically only serving 12 to 15 people a year.

"We'll continue to serve the 300-plus clients the same as we always have," she said. Cathy Melvin, Futures' director of business operations, added that Futures would find a place for both the clients and employed staff of the Encore Shoppe.

All three, however, relayed that they were saddened by the hard decision that had to be made.

"We're sad to have to do it, because we have provided that service to the wider community for 46 years," Donovan said. "I think some people do view it as a service, because they were able to get necessities for a very low price."

"I hope people know we greatly appreciate the support we've gotten over the last 46 years," Melvin said. "I think the hardest part is going to be, once the Shoppe is over, is dealing with how it's affecting the community."