




[Jim Coyle](#)
[Rosie Dimanno](#)
[Joe Fiorito](#)
[Christopher Hume](#)
[Royson James](#)

[Tag and save](#) this article to your
Del.icio.us favourites.

[What is Del.icio.us?](#)

POWERED BY  [del.icio.us](#)

Mall tear-down tears apart a community

Apr. 3, 2006. 01:00 AM

[JOE FIORITO](#)

Dino Kozaris sat in a salon chair and frowned. He has been dressing hair in The Don Mills Centre for the past 30 years. But the mall is about to be to be torn down and redeveloped. Demolition could start as soon as next month, so it's everybody out. The demolition of the mall will send shock waves throughout Don Mills. It's not personal. It's just business

Oh, yeah?

Dino, who started cutting hair when he was in his teens, said, "I have people, I had to put them on a booster board to cut their hair; now I do their kids. I have people who came here in their 50s; now they come with walkers."

Dino is setting up shop in a nearby office building. He isn't sure if all his customers will follow. "I have a client comes every Saturday at 1:30 for a wash and set. She meets her friends for coffee or lunch. That's her Saturday. She's in her 80s. Where's she going to go?"

Good question.

Would he, if asked, come back when the mall is rebuilt? "This has left a bad taste in my mouth."

That means no.

Dino isn't the only mall tenant who is uncertain about the future. Ko's Gift Shop was one of the original tenants when the mall opened 50 years ago.

But Ko's is not part of a larger chain. Raymond Ko, his stock and his staff, will not be absorbed by a parent company elsewhere in the city. He does not want to go out of business, but his future is unclear.

"We have a large following," said Raymond. "I hate to throw that away. I have 500 people on a waiting list, waiting to know if I find another location."

How goes the search? "There aren't many places available. The places available are not nearby, or they are crummy."

And so it feels like the end of an era.

The Don Mills Centre has been around for a long time. It is the birthplace of the Shoppers Drug Mart chain. It has all the usual clothing stores, as well as fast-food, flower, gift and gadget shops.

It's overdue for refurbishment.

The rebuilt mall will not be covered over. It will consist of nice new shops along landscaped streets, as if it were a miniature city. This is a new — or at least a newish — concept in malldom. The changes were to have been staged over several years, but it seems simpler and easier and more efficient just to tear it all down and start fresh.

Not all the tenants are willing to talk openly. Many are frightened of upsetting the negotiations concerning the termination of their leases with the landlord, Cadillac Fairview.

Money talks; money also has the power to shut people up. One tenant told me, "We got a letter that said we should refrain from talking to the media." A spokesman for Cadillac Fairview denied that such a letter was sent.

But the tenant — he or she was adamant that I not identify him or her — said, "We're looking for a new location. We haven't found one yet. This has caused a price war. We're negotiating for space in another mall. You can't quote me. I'll lose everything." His or her eyes welled up with tears.

This is some swell town, where men or women are afraid to talk freely for fear of economic retribution.

The woman who runs Dekao Inc., an oriental gift shop, is lucky enough to have found a new location for her store, so for her the pressure is off. But her new place is smaller, she cannot bring all her stock, and she's a bit nervous about the move.

"I'd rather stay here. I like it here lots. This is my clientele here. The new mall is totally different." It isn't that she fears the unknown. "I'll miss the neighbourhood.... There are a lot of seniors. They have the power to buy. They are educated. They appreciate quality. They are very respectful."

They are also out of luck for the next couple of years.

I prowled the corridors of the mall, and was drawn by the smell of sausage, soup and sauerbraten. Frank Mortzadeh owns Kellen's, a European delicatessen.

He said, "This store has been here since 1975. I have been the owner since May. I didn't know I'd have to move in one year. I thought at least three years."

Frank is finalizing a deal with a landlord for a new location, and he seemed happy — relieved is perhaps a better word — but, "If I knew I had to move, I would have kept my other deli."

That's just business. It's not personal.

Tell it to all the senior citizens in the neighbourhood who like the mall the way it is. Tell it to the empty nesters who moved nearby just because of the mall. Tell it to the people who come for coffee and a slab of strudel and a daily stroll. Tell it to Frank and Dino and Raymond and the others who now have to go elsewhere if they want to stay in business. It's not personal?

The hell it isn't.

Joe Fiorito usually appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Email: jfiorito@thestar.ca

[Additional articles by Joe Fiorito](#)



[Click here for copyright permissions](#)