



Uncle Jon's Music
 33 N. Cass Ave.
 Westmont IL 60559
 Phone: (630) 434-2480
 www.unclejonsmusic.com
 Mon –Thurs: 12:30pm – 8pm
 Fri: 12:30pm – 5pm
 Sat: 10:30am – 4:30pm
 Jon Kostal Jr., Co-Owner
 and Manager

Jon Kostal Jr. (left), alongside Jon Kostal Sr.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

By Michelle Loeb

Community and family loom large over the day-to-day business model at Westmont IL-based Uncle Jon's Music. Those themes permeate every aspect of the store—from the events in which it participates to the ways employees interact with customers—and they extend even to how the store is staffed. Jon Kostal Jr., Co-Owner and Manager, has a few private music instructors and part-time workers on the payroll. Mostly, though, he runs the store alongside his parents and his wife.

"The store is primarily family operated, and we treat the customer like a close family member," Kostal said. "We want to treat everyone like family and to be friendly and attentive, regardless of whether you're buying a sound system or one pick. We go above and beyond to make sure everyone gets what they need and everyone's treated fairly."

Kostal fostered that open atmosphere from day one, when his father and he purchased and reopened the store on January 1, 2004. The location had been home to music stores

dating as far back as the 1950s and, for a year, Kostal had been running a music store in the same location for a friend. Kostal has a background as a musician, having recently earned a masters of music at Eastern Illinois University; his father, meanwhile, had repaired musical instruments for many years. The two had talked before about the possibility of opening their own music store and, when the opportunity came along, they decided to take it.

"Since I already had experience running the previous store in the same location, I felt I had an advantage with that experience under my belt," Kostal explained. "At the start, the store was in a transition, so I spoke with a lot of local musicians and started looking into the products and services that the local community wanted."

Kostal began stocking his store on the basis of these requests from local customers. Specifically, Uncle Jon's Music soon became known for its selection of Heil Microphones, after some of the store's customers started to ask for them. Kostal is always happy to do a special order when customers ask for specific items, and he's even gotten so good at gauging his customers' needs that, sometimes, he's able to order the things they want before they even know to ask for them.

"We had one customer who wanted a music stand light," Kostal began. "And, so, I found one from On-Stage that I thought she would like." He continued, "I ordered it, and she ended up liking it."

Listening to customers' suggestions also led to the formation of a lessons program at Uncle Jon's Music. "The store didn't offer lessons when we first started, but customers were asking for them," Kostal affirmed. "Since I have a background in teaching, I taught some of the lessons myself at first, before we started to hire teachers."

Now, lessons are a major part of the business...what Kostal called "a close second" to sales in terms of generating revenue for the store. He is committed to growing the program, adding

students and rearranging the store to create additional lesson space.

"We see a lot of first timers," Kostal noted, saying the store has a good mix of children and adult students. "The family atmosphere helps, because they're not intimidated. We let them know it isn't too late to start. And it's nice that they stay with us for a long time and don't give up."

Kostal recalled one student in particular who made an impression on him over the years. "Our oldest student was in his late 80s and he passed away recently," Kostal said. "He was the most diligent and dedicated student. He practiced every day. We got to know his family well. That was great to see."

The relationships fostered at Uncle Jon's Music are visible in not only the customer service and repeat business, but also the décor. The store features a customer "Wall of Fame" that's decorated with Polaroid pictures of customers posing with their new instruments. "It's like a family album," Kostal related.

Kostal and his team host events—both at the store and at other local businesses—and take part in neighborhood activities to foster a

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spirit of family and community, ensuring everyone feels welcome and appreciated.

"We have a downtown business alliance, and we'll get together and plan events," Kostal said. He is involved with the local Chamber of Commerce, and his children go to school in the town. "We help out with community events...for example, providing sound equipment for street fairs and things like that. Also, our business district does a Trick-or-Treat Trail at Halloween, during which the stores give out candy to the kids. It's a really nice thing to do, and it gets people into the store who might not have seen it otherwise."

The most popular event at Uncle Jon's Music is its annual customer appreciation party, which it held for the first time on the store's five-year anniversary and which it has continued with ever since.

"We have the party out in the parking lot in back of the store," Kostal explained. "We have a real stage for local bands to play." Those include the Flat Cats, a popular local swing band in which Kostal and his father both perform. The store also has a student showcase and an open mic on that stage. Meanwhile, inside the store, the staff puts items on sale and holds a raffle with items, such as guitars and ukuleles, that were donated by the store's suppliers.

"People look forward to the hot dog party," Kostal added. "I ran into a guy outside of the store, and he told me that his brother never misses it."

Kostal continued, "It's nice to hear people talk like that and recognize me as 'Uncle Jon' from the store." He added, "It's like the old days, where you walk into a business and everyone knows each other." 



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