

Raton's Radio Shack demonstrates staying power

By Tim Keller — For the Comet | Posted: Thursday, February 19, 2015 12:00 am

RATON — When Radio Shack this month announced bankruptcy proceedings that will close many stores, the phone at Raton's downtown Radio Shack store started ringing; it hasn't stopped. "We've had hundreds of inquiries," says Alan Best. "Mostly it's been our own customers worried that they might lose us."

The customers can relax. Alan and Dorothy Best purchased the Raton electronics store in 1981 after managing it for two years as youngsters still in their 20s. They've weathered the immense transformations of the electronics industry—all the way from CB radios to smart phones—as an independent dealer, only 25% of whose products come from Radio Shack. A vibrant anchor business of Raton's downtown historic district, with three full-time employees, they'll survive the national brand's current troubles relatively unscathed.

"The franchise division has always been a separate part of Radio Shack," Alan Best says. "They can't close us because we own our own store. They're just selling us a product, basically, and letting us use their name. We carry all the expenses ourselves—rent, overhead, salaries, everything. After their bankruptcy settles, I expect an even stronger franchise division, because we're the profitable part of their business."

A bankruptcy judge will soon decide whether the Radio Shack brand will survive; if it doesn't, the Raton store will take the corporation name the Bests chose back when they started and the business was dominated by walkie-talkies and CB radios—Two-Way Electronics.

"For the last twenty years," Best says, "our business has been dominated by cell phones and Plateau Wireless cell service. We carry all the major brands—Samsung, Apple, HTC, LG—and the Radio Shack brand is only a small part of our business."

In fact, changes in the national cellular industry provide a bigger threat to the Bests' business than Radio Shack's troubles. AT&T is buying up small cellular providers around the country, then selecting their own vendors. Their purchase of Plateau Wireless is awaiting FCC approval. If AT&T completes the



Alan and Dorothy Best married in Tucumcari as teenage sweethearts 43 years ago.

They took over management of Raton's Radio Shack store in 1979; two years later they bought what is today one of downtown Raton's most iconic businesses. With three full-time employees, the store will continue relatively unaffected by the problems of the national Radio Shack corporation.

purchase and sticks with the Bests' store as their agent, as seems likely, the store will continue to flourish.

It's thrived in the Internet age by providing great customer service with consistent friendly staff. "We have the products right here, in stock. You can see it, hold it, and take it right home," says Best. "Local stores have to compete with the Internet; that's just the way it is. Our biggest advantage is one-on-one customer service, compared to zero of that on the Internet."

Coming from throughout Colfax County and beyond, regular customers are long accustomed to a great and convenient electronics store. "We have a lot of customers in Trinidad," Best says. "We're almost the same town in terms of shopping. We eat there and shop there and they do the same here."

The corporate-owned Radio Shack stores are located mostly in America's big cities. The national media, located in the same cities, report those store closings with nary a mention of the brand's hundreds of independent dealers and franchisees that are mainstays of rural communities throughout the country. Most of those will do just fine.

"The headlines affect us from the consumer's point of view," Best says, "because a lot of people don't know the difference between us and a corporate store. They think we're all the same."

It's a good thing Raton's bustling state-of-the-art electronics store has an old-fashioned telephone on the sales counter because it keeps ringing off the hook. No, the store's not closing, and yes, it will continue to ride the seismic waves of change in the electronics business while providing the new products and services needed by its customers throughout southeastern Colorado and northeastern New Mexico.