



Godfrey Sun Catchers owner discusses business closure

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
June 23 2017 5:40 AM

GODFREY - Thursday, the Godfrey Sun Catchers, located at 5745 Godfrey Road, closed without warning, leaving four employees and a manager out of work.

The Sun Catchers owner - Robert Jones - consented for a brief interview with Riverbender.com to talk about the closing. These are his comments and some followup from a manager.

Former manager of the Godfrey Sun Catchers location, Brittany Hancock, said she worked at the location for nearly eight years. She said Jones offered her potential positions at the Wood River or Collinsville locations of Sun Catchers, but she instead walked out the door and was terminated by Jones. She said she was in tears at the news the four women working under her at that location were going to be without jobs without any notice.

"In reality, it's not hurting him as much as us," Hancock said. "We had no warning about it."

Jones, however, disputes Hancock's assessment of the situation, saying he tried to organize an employee meeting for "some time" previous to the closure. He said, while business had been on a decline for as long as three years, he was hopeful the Godfrey location could remain open.

"We thought we could get together with the landlord for a rent reduction," Jones said. "The day before we were going to close, she (Hancock) said, 'No, I'm not coming back for some stupid meeting.'"

Hancock was then offered a position at either the Wood River or Collinsville location of Sun Catchers at an equal rate of pay, Jones said. Hancock also confirmed this offer.

Jones also said Hancock and her workers did not work toward generating more revenue for the struggling store. He said he had "no complaints" regarding those workers, adding they were good. However, Jones also said they were able to do schoolwork on the clock and tan for free. He showed a reporter from Riverbender.com a stack of 16 mailers and 15 stamps he claimed he had given to Hancock and told to mail to "loyal customers." He said he discovered both the mailer and stamps discarded in a desk.

The mailer, which was to go to the salons "most valued customers," offered \$10 in "Sunnies Cash," which could have been used towards any package or lotion purchase. The incentive also allowed those customers to receive two free upgrades in any bed when someone referred a friend to any Sun Catchers location.

While the rent has not increased since 2011, Jones said the landlord was intending to raise the rent in the future. He said the location was also unusable due to the construction of additional buildings in the strip mall, which blocked the view of Sun Catchers from motorists on Godfrey Road.

"It was supposed to increase, and he wanted it with a new lease," he said. "And the business was not bringing in that kind of money. Most of was due to the shopping center being built in front of us, and we did not have highway visibility. The strip center that is out there right now... We had clear visibility all the way down, and people could read our signboard on the front of the store. They could read our sign, and they could see how attractive the store is when they come in, and people decide at the last minute when they're going to take a trip: I want to get a tan."

With that much notice, a reporter from Riverbender.com inquired why Jones would close his business without giving more notice to his employees or customers. One individual associated with the property owner wondered why Jones continued selling packages to customers while he knew that business was going to close.

"I tried to have an employee meeting, but I could never get a meeting together with them, never," Jones said. "I just couldn't. I've known restaurants that have closed that night right after. One up in Edwardsville did. Bullies, they just closed. That's it, because the employees, they wouldn't care what they did with customers or anything else. You want to remember this: I was very good to my employees, and none of them ever thanked me for letting them tan free. They tanned free. They brought their school books in and studied on my time. They studied on my time. I never said anything. Naturally, they could do their school work and get paid for it, and sit right there and do nothing."

As far as customers of the Sun Catchers franchise, the man on the other end of the phone contacted by Riverbender.com Thursday said customers who have packages and gift deals for the Godfrey Sun Catchers may redeem them at the Wood River location,

located at 1103 West Acton Ave, or the Collinsville location, located at 107 N Bluff Rd. He also said a new Sun Catchers location may one day reopen in Godfrey before dismissing himself as "just someone who works here."