

# Explore The River Bend: The Fix-It Shop repairman leaves legacy in leather

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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Bill Wanger, well known for shoe repair work at The Fix-It Shop, located at 400 State St. in Alton, will soon hang up his tools for the final time.

This will be sad to some, but Wanger hopes to retire sometime by Labor Day. Wanger is one of the last in the Alton area who repairs leather.

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“I do like this kind of work,” he said. “You have to like it to do it. I am lucky I have worked full time since I was 15 and I am 64 years old, so I think it is time to take a break.”

Wanger was born and raised in North St. Louis and in 1985 moved to Godfrey and brought The Fix-It Shop, starting it in Jerseyville. He moved to Alton about 10 years ago when the building he was renting in Jerseyville was sold to make room for the new Walgreen’s store.

Bill's hope is to sell his business or else have his son take over the operation, which is a possibility. He would like to see The Fix-It Shop continue for customers.

The shoe repairman had a friend who lived above a shoe shop in St. Louis and he spent a lot of time there. He started working in a garment factory in St. Louis as a plant mechanic and he learned a considerable amount about the sewing industry. Wanger’s mother was a seamstress.

Repair work for boots is Wanger’s specialty. He said 85 percent of what he does is repairing boots and shoes.

“I also replace zippers in purses, repair jackets, put in new heels or any kind of repairs on shoes,” he said. “I also fix purse straps.”

The shoe repairman said the business is a lost art form. He said there is one such shop in Collinsville and several in St. Louis.

“I always try to do a good job,” Wanger said.

Something Wenger finds odd is many people stop at his State Street in Alton shop and ask him for directions.

“I don’t know if they think I have been downtown for a long time or what, but a lot do ask me for directions,” he said. “I don’t mind; I kind of enjoy it actually.”

One of the most recognizable customers would have to be Karen Foss, formerly an anchor for KSDK (Channel 5) in St. Louis, Wanger said.

The Alton shoe repairman said he and his wife will likely take some short trips once he retires, but he said he is mostly a home body.

He said what has given him the most satisfaction about his occupation has been watching the reaction of people when he has completed a repair successfully.

“I haven’t had anybody say they were unhappy with my work,” he said as he knocked on wood for continued success. “I am lucky to be good with my hands all these years and fixing things. The leather repair business for me was a natural fit.”

There are a bunch of shoes and boots left in the shop that are repaired that he said he hopes people will pick up before he retires.

For more information from Wanger, contact [618-463-2700](tel:618-463-2700).

