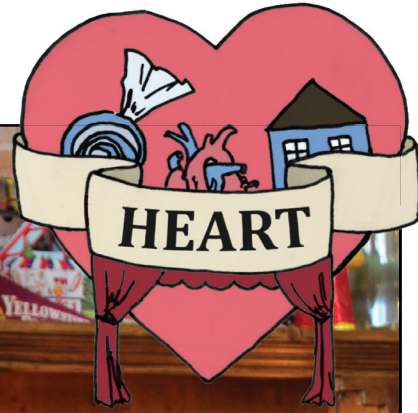


Young at Heart



Posing with his vintage phone, Fort Collins Candy Store Emporium owner Tony Vallejos smiles in front of his shelves filled with candy. Photos by Italia Caro

Candy store owner impacts many with nostalgia, joy

Italia Caro

Sports Editor

The bell rings as the door swings open and the sound of “Rhapsody in Blue” floats through the air. Shoes tap softly on the wooden floor as customers move deeper into the store. Brightly colored vintage toys and memorabilia perch upon the shelves, candy sitting in glass jars with prices on the outside. The golden cash register is stationed near the handheld telephone, and The Candy Man is behind the counter, sporting his mustache and bow tie.

Tony Vallejos, 58, opened the Fort Collins Candy Store Emporium, a store inspired by 1940s general stores and candy shops, last year in August. The items found in the store match the aesthetic of the 1940s.

“Everything is all antique stuff, even these jars here, these jars are from the 20s and 30s. I really put all my attention to detail into this store,” Vallejos said, explaining some of the items in his shop.

To put the store together,

Vallejos recalled the skills he acquired during his time as an interior designer. However, the store had been a project he had been working on for a while.

“But 17 years ago, I started to put this store together, because I knew I was going to retire, because this is my retirement, and so instead of staying home and watching TV like all my sisters do, I thought I’m going to go and find a little place – a little tiny space and just put a bunch of cool stuff and have a bunch of people come visit me! And sell candy,” Vallejos said.

Vallejos’ interest in running a candy store was first sparked when he was living in Athens, Greece, as a child in 1967. Vallejos went to see “The Planet of the Apes” with some friends from his neighborhood and found the concept of the apes acting like humans frightening.

“You see the horse first and it kinda comes up in the air and he lands and there’s a monkey riding it. I lose my mind. I start crying and screaming like it was the worst horror movie I’ve ever seen in my life. I was so frightened

by it, I freaked out and lost all my shizzle,” Vallejos said, laughing about his reaction.

Vallejos was taken out of the theater to calm down, and the lady behind the counter offered to let him hang out with her while he calmed down. To keep Vallejos occupied, she gave him the job of stocking candy. Vallejos organized the other candy as he went, and the lady gave him a candy bar for his hard work.

“That was my first experience working behind a candy bar counter. That’s why I have Planet of the Apes stuff here, because Planet of The Apes, kind of started this whole candy obsession with me, so it took a monkey on a horse to get me.”

The experience Vallejos had as a child inspires him, his customers and the positive outlook he has. His cheerful disposition invites his customers to stay a while. In addition to Vallejos’ easygoing nature, some customers find the atmosphere of the store comforting.

“I have this guy who comes

here every Friday, he’s a college kid and he comes here every Friday around 4 o’clock and he goes ‘I come here because I feel like it feels very homey in here. It just reminds me of home, it’s real calming.’ Which is a great compliment, he thinks of this place as home,” Vallejos said.

While the store gives of an aura of comfort, it also brings a sense of nostalgia for customers. The candy is one item that sparks fond memories in patrons.

“This is bubblegum cigarettes, these blow actual smoke. They’ve been around forever and ever and they’re probably the number one candy in my store. Whether you’re 6 years old or 60 years old, they flip out when they see those. They come back and go, ‘Those really work’ and I go ‘Oh, I know!’ They come and get more,” Vallejos said.

Another nostalgic element is the toys and décor. In December, Vallejos covered the store in vintage decorations.

“There was all this old timey stuff, and people wept in my store. They came up and

go ‘My grandma had that in her window, every year that I remember as a little kid.’ Then they start to cry, because they think about their grandma, they feel bad that they haven’t thought about their grandma for a while, but it takes this little snowman to remind them of their grandma,” Vallejos said.

The store, with its candy and décor has made Vallejos not just popular in Old Town, but throughout Fort Collins.

“They [children] know me as the candy man and it’s kind of like being a little celebrity here,” Vallejos said.

The main mission for Vallejos is to bring joy to everyone by offering his store as a place for memories, laughter, stories and candy.

“I’m going to create a bubble and I’ll have this space in this crazy world of ours, where you can come in and get lost in another dimension,” Vallejos said. “And that’s what I did, I built another dimension, and so, I thought, everything I do is 1930s and 1940s. I built this place, I threw myself literally into this mix.”

