THE OWNERS OF Banner Crafts & Gifts have announced plans to close their Grafton store this spring after more than 25 years in business. The economy and the emergence of retail options in the village's east-side business corridor are blamed for the closing.

Photos by Mark Jaeger

After more than two decades, store owners say business has tailed off

Grafton's Banner Crafts & Gifts has been a favorite destination for crafters and home decorators for more than 25 years, but those days are numbered.

The store owners announced last week that the specialty shop at 1720 Wisconsin Ave. is closing.

"Our lease runs through May 15, so we know we will be out of there by then, but the way the stock is flying off the shelves with the inventory clearance, I doubt we will last through Easter," owner Lori Hayden Teel said.

Banner Crafts started as a family business in Hartford in 1984, and eventually grew to six

locations.

When the Grafton store closes, only the original Hartford shop will remain.

"It is sad to be closing, but with the stumbling economy of the past couple years it just didn't make sense to stay open," Teel said.

"We offer a lot of craft supplies and do custom framing, but when people are losing their jobs and have to cut back on their budgets, it seems like we are an area that suffers. A store like ours appeals to blue-ollar, working-class people who like to do things themselves. It is hard for them to look at the items we sell as necessities."

Teel said another factor contributing to the demise of her store is the shift in business activity in Grafton.

"We used to be in the heart of the business district, but with all of the growth coming in the area of I-43 and Highway 60, we just aren't seeing the kind of traffic coming in that we used to," she said.

The east-side building boom has included the addition of a Michael's Arts & Crafts store and a general merchandise Target store.

"I wouldn't say Michael's was direct competition with us. They tend to deal in higher-priced items, while the stock at our store is constantly changing. You'd never know what you would find," Teel said.

While small retailers often blame on-line stores for more making it difficult to succeed, Teel doesn't buy into that excuse.

"Most of our customers are older, and I don't think they are the kind of people who are comfortable doing their shopping online," she said.

In a letter to customers sent out last week, Teel commented on how close the staff had grown to many of its loyal customers.

"On behalf of our employees and our family, we wish to thank you for your patronage these past years. We have had a lot of positive comments on our store and have been proud to have been a part of the Grafton business community," she wrote.

The store began posting discounts on its merchandise last week, attracting a rush of bargain-hunting customers.

"It has been crazy," Teel said.

She laughed at the suggestion that such a steady flow of shoppers would have meant a different fate for the store.

“That’s for sure,” Teel said.