

After 125 years, musical icon leaves G'town for KOP

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by **Jaimi Blackburn**

After 125 years a Philadelphia icon will be closing its historic location as part of its anniversary celebration for a century and a quarter in business.

Cunningham Piano will shutter its showroom at 5427 Germantown Ave. in Germantown and relocate to a more intimate showroom on the third floor of its piano factory around the corner at 26 East Coulter Ave. and a second new location in King of Prussia at 198 Allendale Rd.

“It was time for us to relocate,” explained co-owner Rich Galassini, who has owned the business with fellow professional musician Tim Oliver since 2008.

“Back in 1987 I began to talk to families who were from the region — Blue Bell, Voorhees and Bryn Mawr — and when I asked them if they knew where we were located in Germantown, they would say ‘Sure’ since so many of them had grown up in Philadelphia.

“Now, however, the children of these clients are buying pianos, and this generation did not grow up in Philadelphia. They know Manayunk and Center City but not Germantown, so it was time for us to open a showroom in a more central, well-known location.”

Cunningham Piano will leave the 9000-square-foot showroom on Germantown Ave., a former Masonic Hall with a performance space on the second floor, and open a new 5500-square-foot facility in King of Prussia in addition to the space at the piano factory.

“We need to reduce our inventory by one-third,” Galassini said, “so we will be having a huge sale now through our move.”

A Philadelphia institution since 1891, Cunningham Piano carries and restores pianos, including their own Cunningham Piano, Steinway, Bösendorfer, Baldwin and more. In addition, Cunningham Piano was just named Artist Services of Greater Philadelphia for Yamaha.

Cunningham is the oldest piano company in Philadelphia and one of the oldest in the world. In the 1930s when he composed “Porgy and Bess,” George Gershwin used a Cunningham piano.

At Cunningham’s current location, there is a wall of celebrity who’s who photos including Luciano Pavarotti Marvin Hamlisch, Marc Andre Hamelin, Yuja Wang, Andre Watts, Garrick Ohlsson, Bobby McFerrin, M. Night Shyamalan, Robert De Niro, Jamie Foxx and other stars who have trusted their pianos to Cunningham.

Last summer during the Pope’s visit Cunningham Piano provided the organ used during the Papal mass.

Cunningham Piano Company was started in 1891 by Patrick J. Cunningham, an Irish immigrant with a craft and a dream. Through his leadership, Cunningham Piano Company quickly became one of Philadelphia’s most respected makers of pianos. Its business shifted in 1943 to restoring pianos — bringing

back the original design, sound and luster of any high-quality piano. Today, the pianos come into the shop from all over the world. Craftsmen can spend a year or more bringing each one back to life.

“It makes sense for us to have a showroom in the factory,” Galassini explained. “Many times when people come to the current showroom to buy a piano, we take them to the factory around the corner to show them how the pianos are made and restored. We also offer tours of the factory to the public.”

Galassini came into the business by chance after a housemate decided to purchase a used upright piano for their house in Fairmount. The piano needed some updates. Galassini had heard of Cunningham, but at the time he didn't know the technicalities of fixing a piano.

“If you would have asked me where pianos came from, I would have said, ‘You know, the piano store or a factory.’ I didn't have a concept of what went into it.”

Galassini and co-owner Oliver both studied music in college. In order to complete his major, Oliver had to choose an instrument. He chose the piano, and his passion for the vocal arts brought him to Philadelphia, where he could be closer to a more operatic scene. He began working for the piano company in 1997.