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**HEADLINE:** BENTLEY'S ANTIQUES SHOP SHUTS ITS DOORS

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**BODY:**

It was time for Helen Delich Bentley to be honest about the shop. The Cockeysville antiques business the former congresswoman and her husband opened as a labor of love nearly 40 years ago was just labor these days.

Dust was collecting on the early 20th century marble-top sideboards in the basement and the Baltimore Potthast cabinets on the second floor.

Business hadn't been brisk at Bentley's Antiques Show Mart for years. It was time to close.

The first antiques mall in the state is open for one last weekend, closing today at 5 p.m. -- 36 years after it spawned a row of quaint antiques stores in the small quarry town in northern Baltimore County. What is not sold this weekend is likely to be on the auction block soon, Bentley said, adding that she doesn't know where and when yet.

"Retail isn't my bag ... never was," said Bentley, 83, whose husband William ran the store from 1971 until his death in 2003. "I can't stand the dust in here. I'm done. It's time to move on."

The Bentley store closing is the third on this row in the past year. The stretch of shops, once a charming enclave in the shadows of the old York Road overpass, used to enjoy solid business in the 1970s and 1980s because what was once a two-lane road allowed families to impulsively pull over and stroll past the shops.

In 1992, the country road was transformed into a seven-lane highway, with cars whizzing by at 50 mph. The horn-honking ire of impatient highway drivers scared customers from pulling over near the shops, shopowners said, and business has taken a dive since.

"It's definitely been a challenge," said Ron Richards, owner of nearby Hunt Valley Antiques. "But I'll certainly miss having Bentley's on the block."

## BENTLEY'S ANTIQUES SHOP SHUTS ITS DOORS The Baltimore Sun March 25, 2007 Sunday

Bentley, a Republican who represented the 2nd District in Congress between 1985 and her unsuccessful run for governor in 1994, opened her store at 11 a.m. yesterday. The first hour, much to her chagrin, brought mostly "lookers."

She watched them wander through the crowded store, picking up linen napkins here, running hands over curved walnut tables there. She watched them from the same desk her husband used for more than three decades, dryly warning a man who tripped over a stool: "Try not to break your neck."

"Antique shops have become weekend entertainment centers: too much looking, not enough buying," she lamented.

By 1 p.m., business picked up. Her dogs, Buddy and Smokey, joined her and feasted on fresh hamburgers she ordered for them.

A longtime advocate for the port of Baltimore, which bears her name, Bentley keeps busy lobbying for the maritime industry and defense contractors. The work takes her out of town regularly, and she hasn't been able to devote much time to the store.

She says the closing is not an emotional time. But the friends who helped organize the store yesterday said she had wrestled with the decision whether to close since last spring.

"This is it," she had told friends in April. But then April turned into August. Then October. Now March.

"This is extremely difficult for her," said Barbara Westra, who was among more than two dozen fledgling antiques dealers who rented space in Bentley's in the 1970s. "She and her husband really loved antiques. They were passionate about it and opening this store. This store was his, and to close it ... it's bittersweet."

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**GRAPHIC:** Photo(s)

Helen Delich Bentley, former congresswoman and gubernatorial candidate, is getting out of the antiques business. Bentley's Antiques Show Mart, 10854 York Road, closes today at 5 p.m.

Doug Kapustin : Sun photographer

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