

Longtime locksmith holds key to success

By Mary Hance
Banner Business Writer

Being a locksmith in the 1980s is pretty much like it's always been.

Although there are computers and electronic systems, a locksmith needs the same patience, mechanical aptitude and honesty that have always been required.

Same as always, according to the folks at Hosse & Hosse Safe and Lock Co., an old Nashville company that has been in locks and keys since the Civil War.

Hosse (pronounced Hosey), located in East Nashville on Woodland Street, may be Nashville's oldest continuously operating business, started in 1865 by A.F. Hosse, a German immigrant.

"I've never checked the records on it, but I've been told that it is the oldest business," said Kirk Alley, the company's owner. The business went through several Hosse generations before being turned over in the 1950s to Alley's father, Doug Alley, and another man, Ralph McIntosh, both of whom had worked

Doug Alley is still in the shop often to check on things, although he has no regular schedule.

"We have to be able to trust our people," said Kirk Alley, noting that almost everybody who works for him now has been there 20 or 25 years.

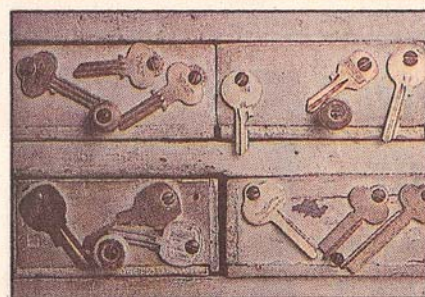
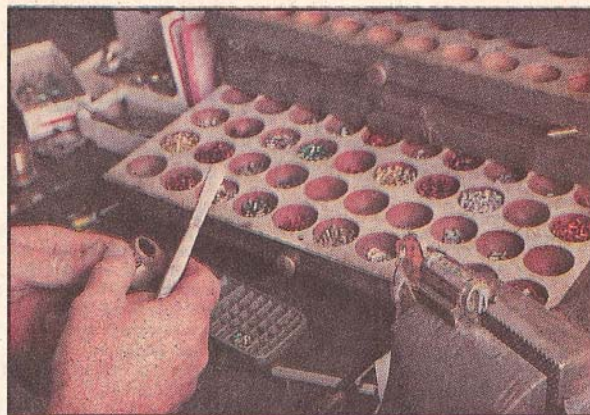
Trust and honesty are obviously big issues in a company where employees have access to keys to all kinds of buildings, offices and homes.

Doug Alley recalled a young man who worked for him several years back and kept asking when he'd be taught how to work on safes.

"He just kept on asking about it," the older Alley said. "I never would teach him.

"I don't ever want to teach anybody to work a safe who's not going to stay with me," he said.

The Alleys, who said 99 percent of the locksmith companies around are family-owned and



Owner Kirk Alley shows off a 200-year-old rim lock. Alley has been in the business 20 years.

Trays of key blanks decorate the Hosse & Hosse Safe and Lock Co. shop.

Banner photos by Steve Lowry

Kirk Alley has steady hands as he works on keying a cylinder lock in the locksmith shop.

generations old, don't take much stock in the correspondence course for locksmiths. They see it as a trade that is learned on the job.

"You can't really learn it that way, in a course," Doug Alley said. "I want to teach somebody how to do it if they are going to work for me. You learn by doing it."

That kind of attitude and trust is what has built Hosse & Hosse's reputation, the Alleys said, noting that every replacement key that goes out of their shop is stamped with the Hosse name.

"We did that when all of the 10-cent stores and other places started making duplicate keys," Doug Alley said. "I got tired of them bringing them back in

when they didn't work and saying we made them.

"We have really been blessed by being around so long with our reputation," said Kirk Alley, who said the industry is growing and becoming more sophisticated with card systems for hotels, and electronic lock systems elsewhere.

"But there is still a lot of trad-

itional lock and key work," he said.

Hosse & Hosse has been a survivor among the old-line locksmiths, with an impressive client list of downtown office buildings, hotels and apartments, as well as residences.

They also make replacement keys, fix old locks, and do a lot of rekeying work on locks.