Tacoma may be brimming these days with the tidy look of polished steel and sandblasted brick, but we draw a certain comfort from knowing that many of the funky, funny old places where we shopped or grabbed a late-night bite are still helping UPS students survive the quotidian grind. And with rediscovered emphasis on close-to-home sustainability, they’re right in tune with the times.
Rankos may have been founded in 1929, but it's thoroughly plugged in; the drugstore has a page on MySpace.com that lists nearly 200 friends. It is owned and operated by Greg and Deanna Rankos, son and daughter-in-law of the founders, who say they aim to keep providing a low-cost, hometown alternative to large chain and mail-order pharmacies. Alas, the soda fountain is gone, but it still has the coolest phone booth in town, with folding wood and glass doors just like the one in The Sting.

A year and a half ago we published “25 Things We Love about Tacoma,” a pictorial round-up of some of the people and places that make living in the City of Destiny below-the-radar hip. It was by far the most popular article we’ve ever published in Arches. One of our regrets in putting that feature together was we had more things we love than space and, so, reluctantly put aside many of the ideas longtime residents had given us.

Pulling out that file recently it struck us that our unused items could be divided into subsets. One of the most obvious: Old Tacoma—historic buildings that are distinctive for their early 20th-century design. The city is rife with them. But as we looked closer we realized that not only are these stalwart structures visually iconic, they house enduring businesses that were serving our needs with close-to-home products and people-friendly practices long before sustainability became the buzzword of the Green Age.

And, so, here, a few more places we love that have been acting locally for a long time.
Call 6th Avenue the Via of Vinyl. You can buy used records at three different stores between Alder and Sprague. Forget the Internet. At Drastic Plastic alumni who wore out the grooves on their copy of “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida” can pick up a replacement, and for digital-age students who eschew new for recycled there are plenty of used CDs and even a big rack of second-hand bluejeans.

In a building built by Ray Gamble, Tacoma’s “Elephant Man,” so-named for the collection of hand-carved ivory elephants he kept in his North End home, the Knapp family opened a deli in 1941. The business soon expanded to include a restaurant, and by World War II the waiting line often extended around the corner to Nelson’s Drug Store. Knapp’s has changed hands three times since, but it still has a small-town feel, and it still serves homemade pies that are baked right upstairs.
“Life is uncertain—eat dessert first” declares an old framed sign behind the display case at Johnson Candy Company. We’d add to that a new saying for the green century: When you can find confections this good just up the road, why buy something shipped from overseas? In business for 89 years and still family-owned—proprietor Ron Johnson (that’s him, left) attended UPS for the autumn term in 1951—the 60 kinds of handmade candy will have you wishing chocolate really was one of the five basic food groups. And after one of their huge, hand-dipped vanilla ice cream bars, you’ll never again settle for something from the supermarket freezer.
FAIRLEY’S FLOWERS TO GO
1620 6th Ave.
Sure, you can order flowers on the Internet, but sometimes a little quality time with your local florist is nice. Farley’s is a 15-minute walk from campus, family-owned, and in business for more than 20 years.

POODLE DOG RESTAURANT, 1522 54th Ave. E.
Gotta love that mural with the dancing dogs. A Highway 99 way station since 1933.
Alright, alright, it’s technically not in Tacoma, but for this last stop on our tour of local business icons we hope you’ll permit us a bit of latitude. The Puget Sound region is blessed with several classic American drive-ins like this, bravely fending off the hamburger industrial complex and doing quite well, thank you. In the Pick-Quick’s case, since 1949. Besides the shakes, things we love most about this place: Watching the ballet of seven people working harmoniously in an area no larger than 50 sq. ft. and that it’s across the road from the Bates Motel. Anthony Perkins not seen. Most recent claim to fame: When Stephen Colbert interviewed Congressman Adam Smith here.