

Cambridge Merchants Adapt to Recession: Net Ample if Narrower

ROBERT REINHOLD Special to The New York Times

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By ROBERT REINHOLD

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—The roof fell in n Gordon Yarlott's leather-goods business last year. It collapsed in a storm, ruining \$10,000 worth of expensive suitcases and hand-

bags in his hand-shop in Harvard Square. Then he got hit by the sagging economy,

which has inflicted further damage on his chronically underfinanced business with tight money and sluggish sales. So, after 18 years in the square, the genial, gray-ing Mr. Yarlott faces an uncertain future.

While Mr. Yarlott's troubles may be a bit tougher than most, the kinds of problems he faces as the economy drifts erratically into recession are not unlike those confronting countless other small enterprises all over the country. Like rowboats in an ocean storm, they are helpless to calm the waters. But they are negotiating every swell with considerable ingenuity and versatility.

There is perhaps no thicker concentration of small businesses in this country than in Harvard Square's winding

streets and alleys. Crammed into a space no larger than a football field or two along the edge of the Harvard campus are 300 or so enterprises selling almost every type of merchandise and service—cameras, books, wine, stereo equipment, sporting goods, travel, fancy goods, imported fabrics, candles, jeans, to name a few.

For the most part they are small and independently owned, serving students and older, more affluent professional people and suburbanites attracted by the square's profusion of unusual shops and restaurants. Chain operations rarely survive here.

Although the square is cushioned somewhat from hard times by its affluent clientele, business is not good. Bankers say retail sales are down by as much as 15 to 25 per cent in many shops, although others, particularly restaurants, are thriving. Still, few businessmen in the area doubt that they will survive these vicissitudes of the economy, and most maintain that they still operate at comfortable, if narrower,

Continued on Page 55, Column 1



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Signs and advertisements along Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mass., reflect the large number of small businesses in the area. For most of them, business is not good.