

EDITORIAL

Time to rethink business in Taos

We don't have to be economists to know many Taos businesses are just hanging on.

Yes, this weekend was a busy one with the Wool Festival and other events, many of them fundraisers. The hotel lots were full and people downtown carried shopping bags.

But it's not like that every day, or we wouldn't be seeing the number of foreclosures and people with uncollected debts in this newspaper's legal sections.

Then, there are the empty shops and closed storefronts.

For five weeks, a series by J.R.

Logan called "Reviving el corazòn" looked at business in Taos, particularly in its downtown.

Stats show that while tourism is definitely a healthy part of the local economy, the biggest industry was generated by the influx of newcomers, be they retirees, second-homers, or those caught up in the dream of living in magical Taos. They may have been tourists first.

But residential construction is down to a trickle thanks to the financing debacle that led to the national real estate bust. Locally, the filing of deeds claiming ownership of two large land grants didn't help.

So, how do we rebound? Some solutions will have to come from local governments, but business owners will also have to help themselves. Here are some suggestions.

Parking: We need a centralized place to park within walking distance of the historic district, perhaps a two-story garage, well-designed so it is not intrusive.

But until then, how about enforcing the two-hour limit on meters so shoppers instead of store employees are using the spaces.

Traffic: Previous solutions offered to detour traffic from downtown; we're glad that didn't happen. We want people to stop in our center, not drive around it.

Let's study the viability of rerouting traffic, so Paseo del Pueblo Sur y Norte and Camino de la Placita are one way.

Merchandise: If a business isn't succeeding, perhaps it's time to assess whether what it's selling

is what people want to buy. If people can't find what they want to buy at a reasonable price, they will go elsewhere, either to a larger community or online.

Plaza: The flowers were gorgeous this year, and the Plaza had its moments when people filled it, like at Taos Plaza Live this summer. As we've said before, close two of its streets to create a marketplace atmosphere similar to what is happening at the neighboring Dunn Shops. Finding a new use for the old county courthouse is an easily achievable goal.

Customer service: We've all been victims of bad customer service from disinterested or rude clerks and shop owners. We will return to those stores where the people treat us like they want our business.

That "it's-good-enough" attitude is not good enough anymore. We'd love to see someone step up to offer classes on customer service and employers reward workers who take them.

Help: Several agencies are there to assist: Taos Entrepreneurial Network; Taos Small Business Development Center; Taos Arts and Cultural District; Taos County Chamber of Commerce. We have listed their contact information on this week's business pages; we will continue to run them as space permits.

Some of these ideas have already been proposed, but local officials didn't have the guts to carry them out due to the pressure of an influential few people.

We want Taos to succeed. But those who are in business need to take a hard look at what is or isn't working. So do our governments.

Let's make it happen.

■ **We want Taos to succeed.**