

Group plans to revitalize downtown

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■ United Downtown Association to form empowerment authority.

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

Rapid City Mayor Jim Shaw and members of the United Downtown Association announced plans Thursday to create a new group that they hope will "inspire, facilitate, empower and actually create ... economic and cultural growth" in the city's center.

The new organization is to be called Rapid City Downtown Empowerment Authority Inc., a nonprofit group. Shaw said during a UDA mixer Thursday night at the Radisson Hotel.

A decade ago, Shaw was chairman of the downtown business group. He and his wife, Bev, own Prince &

See **Downtown**, Page C2

Downtown: Plans

From Page C1

Pauper Village bookstore on Mount Rushmore Road. He said the new organization will not compete with or overlap the UDA, which is primarily involved in retail promotions and other merchant activities. The empowerment authority, he said, will be "synergistic but different."

The five initial areas the new group hopes to tackle are:

■ **Aesthetics.** The group will look at various city ordinances that might stand in the way of a livelier and more vibrant downtown — more creativity in business signs, more outdoor cafes and merchandise displays and more community events.

■ **Parking.** The group will look at such things as trolley buses and changes to the mix of free parking and metered parking to encourage people to come downtown.

■ **Redevelopment of city parking lots.** Shaw and others have been talking about this since last summer. Ideas included forming partnerships with developers to build apartment buildings or other residential space on land that is now used for city parking.

■ **Historic preservation.** The group hopes to encourage renovation and preservation of the downtown business district's historic facades and storefronts.

■ **Public art.** Shaw said the group will help promote a number of public art projects such as murals in alleys and other public art, in addition to the ongoing City of Presidents sculpture project.

Shaw said the group's organizers hope to have a board of directors in place within the next 60 days. A year from now, he said, the public should begin seeing changes to downtown Rapid City.

Joe Kampa, the current president of the UDA, said the downtown group supports the Downtown Empowerment Authority. He also said the UDA has been active in its work to promote the downtown shopping district during the upcoming holiday shopping season.

Events include the tree-lighting ceremony on Nov. 28, the day after Thanksgiving, and the Festival of Lights on Nov. 29.

Also, Chris Johnson of the Clock Shop is organizing an event called Super Sunday/Sounds of the Season on Dec. 7. More than 30 downtown businesses will be open that Sunday, and most will have Christmas singers or other forms of live music inside the stores during the afternoon.

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