

If you invite them, where will they park?

MONEY: Pumpkin Festival organizers question city parking enforcement.

By Andrea J. Cook
Journal staff

Rapid City seems to have picked a peck of parking complaints for the upcoming Pumpkin Festival.

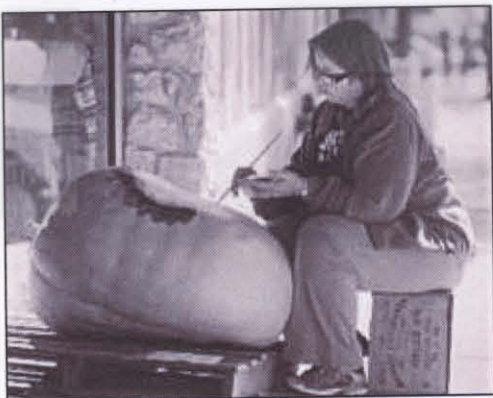
Some of those involved in the second annual festival are questioning why the city is charging for parking at an event designed to draw people downtown.

"It's like inviting someone to supper and telling them to bring your own food," said Joel Schwader. Schwader sold his kuchen at the 2009 Pumpkin Festival and wound up going home with a parking ticket.

Schwader said that several Farmers' Market vendors were ticketed while they operated

Street blockage

Three blocks of Seventh Street — from St. Joseph Street, south to Columbus Street — will be blocked off for the second annual Pumpkin Festival, which runs from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Oct. 2.



Journal file

Elaine Ainsworth paints one of the pumpkins entered in the 2009 downtown Pumpkin Festival's Pumpkin Weigh in Contest for the Artist in Action Painting Giant Pumpkins. Pumpkin Festival organizers are criticizing the city's commitment to enforce parking rules during the second annual event this year.

PARK: City to enforce rules during Pumpkin Festival.

From Page A1

their booths at the festival, as were their customers.

"It was endless the number of people that came by our booths and were complaining about the parking tickets," Schwader said.

Sandra Schwan, president of the Rapid City Downtown Association, shares Schwader's concern about the parking challenges, and would like to see parking restrictions relaxed during downtown events.

Rapid City Mayor Alan Hanks, however, said city ordinances prevent suspending of parking enforcement for special events.

"There is nothing in ordinance that allows us to give special permits," Hanks said.

Schwan understands that parking restrictions such as meters, and one- and two-hour zones are necessary to discourage employees from taking parking spots better used by customers. But two hours is not adequate when people come downtown for an event, especially when there's shopping available, Schwan said.

"I feel very strongly that when we encourage people to come for downtown events, that the two-hour parking creates an issue," Schwan said. "In that, when they go to move their car, we're always fearful that they just leave, and I hate to see that."

Three blocks of Seventh Street — from St. Joseph Street, south to Columbus Street — will be blocked off for the second annual Pumpkin Festival, which runs from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Oct. 2.

The city does open the parking ramp and its leased parking lots for free public parking on Saturdays and

Sundays, but enforces parking regulations in all metered and timed zones on Saturday.

"Our duty is to enforce parking ordinances just like we do traffic ordinances," police Chief Steve Allender said.

Parking enforcement officers will be out during the Pumpkin Festival, but Allender added a caveat: "Discretion is a logical and necessary part of enforcement."

Neither Allender, nor city officials could say how many parking tickets were issued during last year's Pumpkin Festival, but Schwader insists the numbers must be high.

Jo Novak, who manages the Farmers' Market with her husband, Leonard, heard several complaints from customers last year about parking tickets. Customers also complained about having to walk long distances to reach all of the vendors and activities, she said. The location was particularly challenging for older customers, Novak said.

Novak is confident that some of last year's issues will be resolved this year. Vendors are permitted to park one vehicle and their trailers next to their booths, Schwan said.

Schwan is also working to arrange parking space in private lots for vendors.

Combining the Farmers' Market with the Pumpkin Festival is good for both events, Schwan said. The festival is intended to be a harvest festival, and it introduces new customers to the products offered at the Farmers' Market.

Downtown Association officials paid for the parking tickets that some vendors received last year. Schwan said. But association officials wouldn't pay Schwader's ticket because he refused to park in his designated spot, Schwan said.

Contact Andrea Cook at 394-8423 or andrea.cook@rapidcityjournal.com.