

Workers practice parking shuffle

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Editor's note: Downtown employees have to park somewhere. If their employers don't provide parking, employees who drive have four options: lease a parking space, plug a parking meter, park a few blocks away from downtown and walk, or do the two-hour shuffle — moving their cars every two hours to take advantage of free two-hour parking downtown. Time, money, location and availability all play a part in which option they choose. Today's story, part of a series on the downtown parking situation, looks at the issue from downtown employees' viewpoints. Tomorrow, the series concludes with a peek at the job of a downtown parking officer.

By Heidi Bell
Journal Staff Writer

Today's dance lesson is the Two-Hour Shuffle. It goes like this:

10:40 a.m. — Time for one more phone call.

10:50 a.m. — Put on coat, hat, gloves.

10:55 a.m. — In the car. Out of the parking space, around the block. There's one. Pull in. Lock up. Check the time. Head back in.

Repeat steps every two hours.

Plenty of downtown employees know this dance well. Some perform it three times a day, every day, with finesse that borders on an art form.

Most have their own styles and variations on the shuffle. They have secret parking spots, parking patterns, methods for removing chalk marks from tires. Their inner clocks are set to go off every 115 minutes to avoid a \$5 parking ticket.

Avoiding the cost of a leased space or a parking ticket is the main motivation for most shufflers. But weather, daily schedules, safety and



Koenig



Geitz

other factors also play a role.

"I don't like to walk down to the parking lot at night," said June Geitz, who works at the Sixth Street Deli & Bakery. "I decided I'd rather move my car around."



Knecht

That's tricky if customers come in at the two-hour mark, but usually they manage.

"I can't really afford the \$30 a month (to lease a parking space)," said Deli employee Kim Koenig. "I usually park in the meters, but sometimes there aren't any places."

The threat of a ticket doesn't deter most shufflers. "The \$5 isn't bad," said Amy Caprile of The Daily Grind. "The \$10 when I forget to pay it is."

Here in the wide open spaces of the West, some believe it is inherently wrong to pay to park.

"It's tough to get people to pay for parking," admitted Community Development Director Bonnie Hughes, and there are always people who would rather try to beat the system.

Some downtown businesses provide parking for their employees.

Neugebauer's Jewelry shuffles parking passes among employees according to work schedules.

Gary Reynolds rents spaces for all American Memorial Life employees who can't fit in the business' own lot. Right now, he's renting 58 spaces.

"I'm the No. 1 customer of the city," he said. "We have spaces rented in every (city) lot."

The Rapid City Journal rents spaces in its own lots to Journal employees, but it has a waiting list.



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Park: Parking a problem for many downtown workers

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Other businesses, like the Hotel Alex Johnson, do not provide employee parking.

"Our policy ... states that employees are to park in designated areas (off main downtown streets)," said the hotel's Jim Didier. "Employees do get write-ups if they are parked in non-designated areas."

Jill Maguire, owner of American Pie Bistro & Marketplace, doesn't provide employee parking but asks her staff not to park on the main street. "But what you tell them and what they do are two different things, especially when the weather gets cold," she said.

Dan Crain, owner of Main Street's Global Market, asks employees not to park outside the store but doesn't enforce that.

He knows why it happens. "A person that's making minimum wage is not going to go out and buy a pass," Crain said. And, "I've had employees that are scared to walk over there (to the leased lots) at night."

Employees aren't the only ones

who say they can't afford leased parking. Small business owners say \$30 per month per employee is more than they can pay.

David Knecht of The Perfect Hanging Gallery used to rent parking for employees in downtown city lots. "That was just super until they started raising the fees so much that I couldn't afford it," he said.

Neither could he afford to have employees going out to move their cars every two hours when his business was located on St. Joseph Street. For him, off-street parking was a major draw of the Kansas City Street building where his store is now.

Not everyone who spends her days downtown wants to — or can — do the Two-Hour Shuffle.

"We get a few breaks but not long enough to move around the block and find another spot," said Dawn Quashnick, a student at Headlines Academy. She bit the bullet and leased a parking space nearby.

Quashnick put in for a spot three months before starting classes. "I paid a month ahead of time without even using it," she said.

That was smart, considering there

are 159 downtown employees who want to lease a city parking space but can't. All 402 leased spaces in the five city lots are currently filled.

Jessica Burnam, another Headlines Academy student, has a leased spot in the Stockgrowers lot east of Fifth Street but is hoping for a place closer to her classes at Sixth and Main. "Sometimes, I have to walk alone," she explained.

At around \$20 per month, the Stockgrowers lot is cheaper than other city lots because it's more remote. Burnam thinks even \$20 is a bit high, but "I always have a guaranteed parking place."

Greg Schmidt and his fellow employees at the U.S. Social Security office might be glad to get spots in the Stockgrowers lot once they move to their new office in the old JC Penney building in February.

"We just know that it's going to be tough," Schmidt said. Some are on the waiting list for parking, but he thinks most plan to wing it until the new parking ramp is done.

"We're really pleased to see that they're going ahead with the ramp," he said. "Know of any good places to park down there?"