Birth of a new Downtown

By Steve Burger

Downtown Rapid City is in the delivery room and the pains are starting.

The baby is a new Main Street, from the ground up, and it's due out in the world by next November.

But if the first labor pains are any indication, the $3.6 million project is not going to be an easy delivery for downtown business owners.

The construction at Fifth and Eighth Streets so far this fall is cutting into profit margins—deeply, in some cases—leaving some Main Street merchants wondering what's going to happen when the real work starts next year.

Randy Hildebrant, owner of Sir Randy's Floor Coverings, says his business is down by half from last fall, although Hildebrant is quick to point out that some of the decline is due to a sluggish economy. Still, he says, "It's worse than I expected."

For others, sales figures are even with last year, or a little better. Larkin and Jones Appliance is in the middle of the block between Eighth and Ninth Streets, one of the worst locations during this fall's construction. But co-owner Steve Jones says customers are still getting to the store. "Big ticket items seem to make a difference," he says. "People make the extra effort to buy from a place they trust."

Jones says his sales numbers are about even with September and October of last year, but he's not so optimistic about the six- to eight-week period when the street will be torn up right in front of his store during actual construction next summer. He says business will probably drop when his only entrance is the alley behind the store.

Across Main Street at the Hilton Inn, manager Glyn Morgan says his food and beverage business is actually a little better than last year. Morgan attributes the increase to different entertainment in Filly's lounge and additional access to his business from the Eighth Street side.

While he didn't have an exact figure, manager Clem Zambon at RCC Western Store in the 600 block says his sales are down since construction started at Fifth and Main. Zambon says he was resigned to the fact that sales are going to suffer during construction. But, he says, "It is something that has to be done."

If the downtown area is giving birth to a new Main Street, then Klare Schroeder is the attending physician. Schroeder is the project manager of the Main Street construction for the City Engineer's Division.

Schroeder says the concerns coming from some Main Street merchants now that work is underway

Main Street Reconstruction

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