Downtown businesses not in a rut despite street conditions

By RON KROESCH
Journal Staff Writer

While the condition of Rapid City's downtown streets can be blamed for damaging tires and rock absorbers, it does not seem to be adversely affecting business to any great extent.

Two-thirds of the 25 downtown stores polled in a Journal survey Tuesday said business was up from last year. However, all the businessmen queried said they have been receiving plenty of complaints from downtown of tires, traffic congestion and lack of parking.

Not surprisingly, those businesses most adversely affected are those which rely primarily on walk-in or tourist trade.

Of the six downtown department store managers questioned, only two complained that sales volume was down. One manager said business was down from 5 to 10 percent from last year, while the other reported a constant stream of shopper complaints about the streets. Another manager said, "We're seeing a good increase in sales over last year." A third manager said he has no idea how much the mess up streets have decreased our increase.

Another manager said his store was showing a dollar increase over last year, but a good part of that was due to inflation.

Lloyd Cokerich, owner of the Toy Hobby Center, 322 St. Joe, said he has noticed a decline in tourist business this summer, since the "tourists just don't seem to be stopping on these rough streets." Cokerich added that he was "discouraged" with the county's traffic management program. "I think it is necessary to send traffic through streets in this condition, when such a small amount of effort would be required to smooth out these bumps and fill up the big holes between cracks," he said.

Mick Mudlin, manager of Larry Blum's, 701 Main, said his business was hurt by street construction June and July, but August sales seem better thus far.

Pete Geyerman of Geyerman's Ready to Wear, 608 St. Joe, said it is difficult to tell just how much effect the streets have on his store, although business is running ahead of last year. "I've had tourists come into my store amazed at the streets and ask whether this was a result of the recent rain," Geyerman said.

Another clothing store manager said he has received calls from would-be shoppers who have telephoned saying they were on their way to the store but decided not to go home when they hit the bumpy and traffic downtown. At the same time, he said his sales have not been greatly affected.

Ron Stephenson, of Stephenson Music Co., 909 Main, said his store's business was up over the summer months, but was lower than last year. "I attributed the growth in business to money generated by the construction activity in the city," the past year, "Of course, the laborer's strike and the drought may have some adverse effect in the future," he said.

Leonard Bachman of Seeley Men's Clothing, 617 St. Joe, said he has been pleasantly surprised by the small number of complaints he has received from shoppers in regard to the streets. He added his business has not been greatly affected.

"Even though it's hard to get around, most people seem to accept the necessity of it," he said.

One young business man, Richard Barr, owner of the Tower of Sound, 530 Main, said business is up since street construction/ demolition started.