

# Downtown parkers fed up with fines

12-14-83

Ken Baka  
Staff Writer

Mary Eyster is glad she no longer works in downtown Rapid City. It's like saving \$140 a month in overtime parking violation fines, she says.

Elaine Jorgensen, another downtown employee, has accumulated so many \$2 tickets that she's fighting the city in court.

And for Mae Crocker, playing "musical cars" and getting tickets every working day is an occupational hazard.

The three women have amassed about 200 tickets this year for downtown parking violations. The tickets could have been paid off at \$2 apiece. But because the women are frustrated with the parking system — or are just being stubborn — the \$400 in fines they collectively owe has ballooned to \$3,000 — or \$15 a ticket instead of \$2.

These women say they're living proof that downtown parking spaces are dear and that overtime parking tickets multiply madly on some windshields.

But Eyster, Jorgensen and Crocker are also rare, say the police attorney and the department's warrant officer, because of the number of tickets they have outstanding. City officials say \$15,323 in parking fines haven't been collected in 1983.

Businessman Dennis Lihs empathizes with the women. He knows the frustration of trying to find a parking

spot in a downtown once said to need 575 more 8-hour parking spaces.

"I was hung up on it for about six years," said Lihs, a reformed parking antagonist and owner of Perfect Hanging Gallery, 628 St. Joseph St., of the parking "game." "If I got a \$2 ticket, then (I figured) I got to run a red light or turn right on red."

If it was a 50-cent ticket (which it was in the past), Lihs would pay 49 cents, wait for a notice to pay 51 cents on the next ticket and then chuckle about wasteful postage costs.

"It was kind of crazy," he said. "Some of these people can really get obsessed with this thing."

Eyster, who works at the Travelodge, 125 Main, was so obsessed and bitter that she was going to challenge her 48 parking tickets in court and drag in meter maids as witnesses, if necessary.

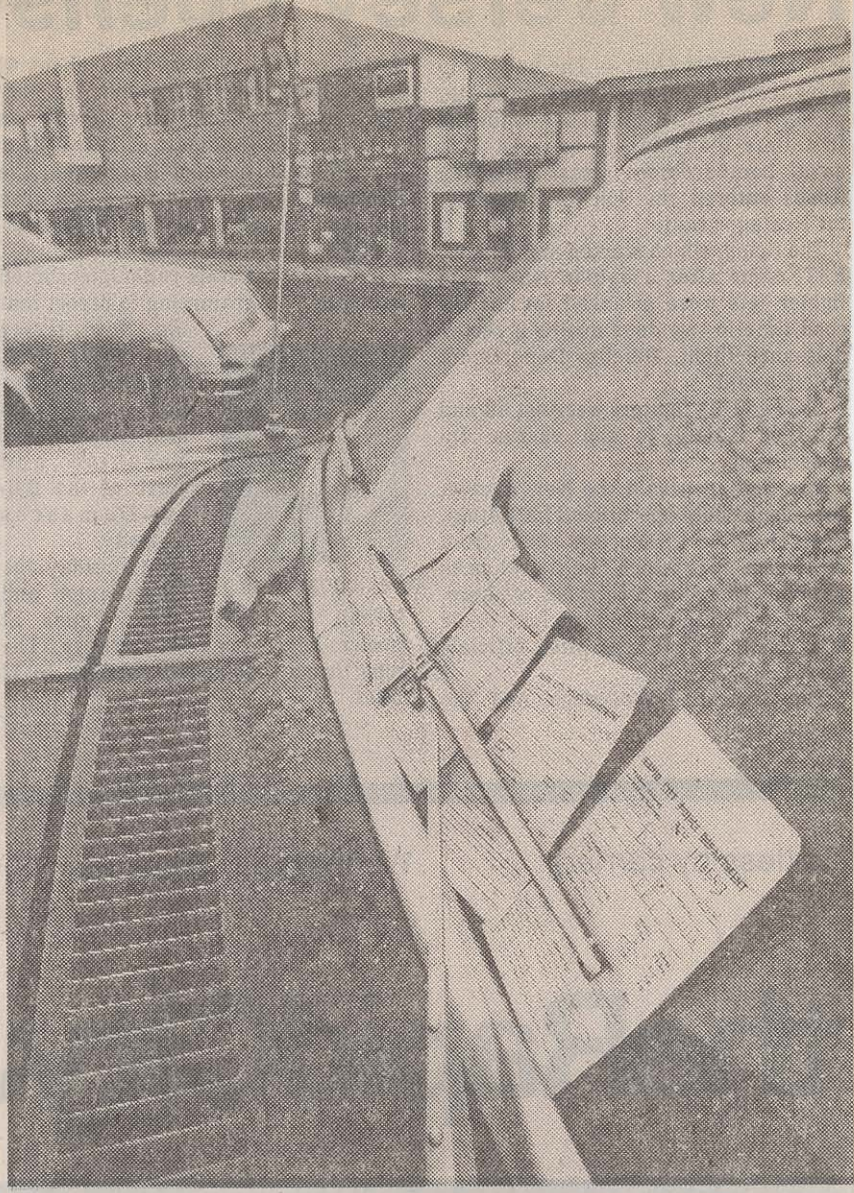
"I've never paid them but I never threw them away either," said Eyster, 33, who accumulated her tickets from May to September while working at the Alex Johnson Hotel.

Instead, she recently pleaded guilty to 24 overtime tickets and agreed to pay \$24 in court costs and \$360 in fines.

Even though the judge dropped the other 24 tickets, the cost was high enough for Eyster to conclude, "I really feel now I should have paid them and not have tried to fight."

For Jorgensen, a current employee at  
Parking tickets continued on page 2





A windshield like this one adorned with five overtime parking tickets has been common for some downtown

employees. (Staff photo by Bob Carlson)

## Parking tickets

Continued from page 1

the Alex Johnson, parking tickets are akin to discrimination in the workplace.

"I don't feel I should have to pay for the right to work downtown," she said.

And so she hasn't. She's pleaded innocent to 56 parking tickets received between February and September, amounting to \$840 in fines. And until her Dec. 22 trial in magistrate court is over, Jorgensen will say little more.

Rapid City Police Attorney Tim Tobin said Jorgensen has been given time to check whether she hasn't been charged twice for some tickets because "she gets so darn many."

For Crocker, 52, the years of playing musical cars — and getting two to three tickets a day — ended this month. She has temporarily rented a spot at the Prairie States Life Insurance parking lot.

Crocker estimates she's received 100 tickets in 1983. About 30 remain unpaid.

"I'll end up paying them," she said, "but they'll get it (the money) at my leisure, that's for sure."

Crocker and Eyster say the city ought to establish a system of tagging downtown workers' cars less often, charge a monthly parking fee, or reduce fines for downtown workers.

Eyster had hoped that refusing to pay her daily \$6 to \$8 in fines might draw some attention and prompt a solution.

"I just wanted to open some people's eyes," she said. "If I would have still been working downtown I would have pressed it further."

Taking a job away from downtown has been like "a \$140 raise a month," she said.

Mike Konvalin, president of the Downtown Association, knows of Eyster's situation. But he wouldn't

comment on suggestions she has made to the association or about downtown parking in general.

The city prosecutes the violators only after they are notified that the \$2 ticket has grown to \$15. That's when police obtain a warrant and try to serve it. If the person doesn't appear in magistrate court, a bench warrant is issued.

City Attorney Tobin said few motorists accumulate more than 30 outstanding tickets. But he has gotten lots of complaints about downtown parking from people who've gotten tickets over the years.

"I tell them that if you can find a better way to set up the regulations, (take it to the council) and I'll enforce them."

Until then or until the city builds a downtown parking garage, such as the one proposed by Mayor Art LaCroix, downtown parkers will continue their "game" — like the one which Lihs said is played by downtown college students.

"They set 2-hour timers at their desks and run outside to their cars when the timers go off," he said. "It's crazy."