Downtown Association isn’t cure-all

Merchants and institutions in downtown Rapid City are being asked this week to join or stay with the Downtown Association for the coming year. Along with the application form or bill for dues are lists of 1981 accomplishments and 1982 goals.

We wish to congratulate the individual and collective efforts of everyone downtown for helping to contribute to the overall development of this most critical neighborhood in the community. New parking lots, corner beautification, completion of the Hilton and remodeling of the Alex Johnson Hotels, restoration of the Buell Building and start of construction on the new Prairie States Life Insurance Building are some of the most visible improvements. With this kind of constructive enthusiasm going for downtown Rapid City, everyone is eager for future growth within the city’s center.

But behind the storefronts and offices, many of the same differences and problems that have been identified with downtown continue. Some want to move swiftly, while others are content with status quo. Some are cooperative and unselfish in helping others, even if close competitors, while others remain jealous and petty. In all, the contrasts and comparisons would make a list long enough to satisfy even the most inquisitive urban sociologist.

Yet these are human qualities found in all of us. Like them or not, they are part of the fabric found in a free society and part of what makes finding success in the business world such a challenge.

There is just one thing about, the Downtown Association that we find troubling. Sadly, surrounding all of its accomplishments and promise for the future, there are a few downtown residents who believe the Association should be some kind of rule-enforcing forum that guarantees harmony, good will and an ample supply of free-spending customers.

They get enthused about joining the Association, pay their dues and take a stab at helping with one or more projects. But then if everything doesn’t develop to their liking, they either grow bitter and quit during the heat of their anger, or they quietly pout that “downtown” just can’t work together.

These people are naive if they expect a diverse, competitive marketplace to be a cozy haven where dollars are easily made and problems easily solved. It’s easy to see some of the differences and difficulties found within the downtown community will never go away. Facing that, the challenge for everyone should be to do the best they can, using the Downtown Association as just part of their plan.