

The Value Of Special Events

November is the second biggest sales month for downtown retailers and restaurateurs. One of the reasons contributing to this fact might be that November host more downtown special events than any other month. During November, we can all look forward to the Pensacola Film Festival on November 3rd, 4th, and 5th, the Veterans Day Parade on November 11th, Gallery Night on November 17th, the Turkey Trot Run on November 18th, Bank of Pensacola's Elf Parade on November 24th, the Community Holiday Light-Up Ceremony on November 24th, and Winterfest on November 24th, 25th, and 26th. Each of these events bring thousands of additional people into Downtown Pensacola to experience and enjoy the event, create positive memories with family or special friends, and take-in the local flavor of the offerings found in downtown.

All of the special events listed above create atmospheres and settings that attract people into the unique and historic part of Pensacola. Establishing the special environments that create the desired (and delivered) enthusiasm doesn't just happen and takes a lot of hard work to maintain. Each of the special events noted above have cadres of volunteers working scores and in some cases hundreds of hours to present a quality event that will deliver a memorable, enjoyable, and positive impression for the attendees, the downtown, and Pensacola. We all owe a great deal of thanks to the unsung volunteers that make these events possible for all of our visitors, our tourists, and us.

When special events are well planned and well executed in the downtown, their very presence reaffirms again and again that the downtown is a focal point for the community. Where else would we really hold any of the events listed above and expect the same outcomes – except Downtown. Enjoyable special events contribute to the positive imagery of the downtown. They create additional reasons for people to visit downtown again or for the first time. They also focus attention on downtown's commercial and residential assets just by their proximity, their hours of operation, their promotion, and the exploration by the crowds that such events attract.

Each of the events planned for November has - in their positioning and marketing plans - targeted specific subsets of our market as potential attendees. As a result, when these targeted groups materialize, opportunities for existing downtown businesses to gain access to new customers are created. These events also present opportunities to change old and incorrect perceptions about what happens downtown or what is available in the downtown. And lastly, these events reinforce the value of the many wonderful attributes of place and design that those of us that work or live downtown everyday sometimes take for granted.

Local independent businesses benefit far more from locally based and locally produced special events than do franchise or chain operations. Far more people that come to experience the unique celebrations and offerings of a community seek to extend that

undertaking by visiting some of the special places that they can't find anywhere else in the community while downtown for the event. Sometimes it is to have dinner or make a purchase. Other times, its just to see "the real Pensacola" or to make sure they know where the business or organization is located in anticipation of a return visit. Downtown businesses as a group are the prime beneficiaries of three kinds of spending associated with the production, promotion, and presentation of local special events. Dollars spent at the special event venue are re-circulated in the local economy three times longer than events produced by national promoters. Those attending the special events generate their own expenditures outside of the special event venue on things such as food, drink, gifts, souvenirs, lodging, gasoline, and other consumer items. Local special event promoters also tend to make many times more purchases of items needed to present the event from local vendors.

Many of the folks that attend one of the special events scheduled for downtown during November are coming back for a repeat of the positive experience from a year gone by. With the exception of Winterfest, the majority of attendees for the November downtown special events come from within the region. Many of the downtown events involve families and in some cases extended families because attendance and participation in the events has become a valued tradition of togetherness.

We also know from some of the DIB's recent research with businesses that have chosen to locate or expand their operations in the downtown during the past year that the second most frequent reason given for choosing downtown was the "frequency and variety of downtown special events" for the employees and owners to enjoy just a few steps from where they work. Increasingly, this same positive attribute is being voiced as well by the new residents moving into downtown. While attending downtown special events, people are also indirectly exposed to the rich history, grand architecture, and inviting green spaces that encompass Downtown Pensacola. It's no wonder that an appreciation of history and the public parks of downtown are both often mentioned as one of the top three things visitors enjoy and value when visiting downtown.

The many unique special events held downtown each month contribute greatly to the vitality of our center city and the lifestyle of Pensacola on several levels. Let's each commit to take advantage of as many of these events as possible. It's good for downtown and for Pensacola.