

Stores unite for holiday sale

Downtown shops host open houses to mark beginning of the Christmas season

David Hatfield
for the Index

The holiday season is approaching, and a group of downtown Kirksville merchants wasted no time this past weekend getting into the spirit.

A collection of 17 store-owners in downtown Kirksville organized a Christmas open house to provide an opportunity for their customers to get a jump on holiday shopping. The event was purposefully scheduled to coincide with Hallmark's national Christmas open house. Citizens were advised to 'watch for the red ribbons' in the shop windows, indicating which stores were participating.

Rosalie Caldwell, owner of The Green Door on Washington Street, said this was a rare occurrence for downtown Kirksville merchants.

"Every year in the past, individuals have had their Christmas open house," she said. "This [was] the first time in several years where [we've] all [done] it at the same time."

Caldwell said she talked with other merchants in the downtown area, and they thought working together would provide a better experience for everyone.

"[We] got to talking, and we decided to see if we could do a consolidated one for everybody so they could come to town and go to more than one store," she said. "It's not just to get the regulars, but new people in so they can come downtown and see that we have a nice shopping area with a variety of things."

Caldwell said timing played a big role. "One of the reasons we picked this weekend is because we knew we were shirt-tailing with [Hallmark's] national advertising, which is very cost effective," Caldwell said.

She said the event was very Christmas-oriented because many customers already have begun to do their Christmas shopping, and the merchants wanted to take advantage of this.

She said the merchants also wanted to show the variety of products each different store has to offer.

"We want the local people to come in and enjoy themselves, as well as the out-of-town people, and to realize what we've got is a good thing," Caldwell said. "We all work together downtown to try to make each store different. We're really lucky to have our downtown."

Liz Srnka, the owner of the Edna



Ornaments adorn a Christmas tree inside The Green Door, one of the many shops on the Square downtown that participated in the Kirksville Merchants Fair on Saturday afternoon.

Courtney Robbins/Index

Campbell Bookstore on Washington Street, is one of the merchants who helped organize the event.

Srnka said she was very pleased with the number of merchants who were willing to participate and she expects that the event will continue to grow.

"I'm very happy that 17 merchants agreed to do this," she said. "I'm hoping that ... next year it can be bigger and better."

She said not every store downtown has an annual open house, but together, the cost of advertising for the event is much

cheaper, and the likelihood of more holiday shoppers is higher.

Srnka said that even though the merchants were having an open house at the same time, each individual store could do its own thing.

Srnka said anyone in town could come in and have samples of the food products she sells and enter a drawing for gift certificates.

Wilma Yates, manager of Kirlin's Hallmark on Franklin Street, said the store did not participate in the event

because of its own national Christmas open house.

Yates said she had no problem with the Kirksville merchant's Christmas open house coinciding with Kirlin's Hallmark open house.

"I want everybody to be successful," she said. "We're definitely very busy all day long."

She said there was not a drastic change in the number of customers she had, and the store would have been busy all day whether or not the other Kirksville mer-

chants had their open house at the same time.

"We had lines of people waiting to get in at 8 o'clock, and then we had lines all day long," Yates said. "It was continuous."

She said the store always has a good turnout of customers at the open house because the Christmas shopping season is in full swing.

"The open house is kind of an indicator to us as to how the season will go, and if that holds true this year, we will have a very successful season," Yates said.

Judicial system undergoes revisions to help children

Elizabeth Sandhu
for the Index

Abuse victims who take their cases to court often have to tell their story to strangers repeatedly. Sometimes these victims are only young children.

Kim LeBaron, executive director of Victim Support Services in Kirksville, said plans are under way to prevent the young victims from having to retell their stories to multiple officials in the criminal justice system.

Adair County Prosecutor Mark Williams said under the judicial system in Adair County, when a child is reported to have been sexually or physically abused, he or she must go through various interviews between the initial investigation and a subsequent court case.

In six to nine months, Victim Support Services will add a child advocacy center where juvenile victims of abuse can have a taped interview with a forensic interviewer, LeBaron said. The purpose of this interview is to

minimize the times children have to recount their experiences and potentially keep them from having to testify in court.

"Whenever you work with children who are being exposed to a system that was originally designed to be used by adults and is being used by adults, it doesn't take very long to see that kids are being impacted in ways that are very hurtful to them," LeBaron said.

The forensic interviewer questioning the children will be highly trained in working with children, LeBaron said.

The interviewer will ask questions that are not leading and allow the child to tell the whole story from his or her point of view, she said. The interview would take place behind a two-way mirror, and a police officer, prosecutor or another necessary party could watch the interview from the other side of the mirror.

Law enforcement, child advocacy workers or the prosecuting and defense attorneys then will be able to view the tape for further

reference, LeBaron said. She said this could help clarify any discrepancies or questions.

"Everyone gets the information at the same time, and this way is less stressful to the child," LeBaron said.

In Adair County, juvenile victims of abuse are taken to Columbia to be interviewed by a forensic interviewer at Columbia's Child Advocacy Center, Williams said. By this time, Williams said the child likely has spoken already with a police officer, juvenile officer and sometimes with Williams or the assistant prosecutor. The actual number of interviews a child has to go through depends on the investigator who starts the case.

Williams said he hopes a Child Advocacy Center in Kirksville will bypass some of this process and allow the child to tell his or her

story a fewer number of times.

There are multiple benefits to this new system, Williams said. Fewer interviews for the child is one of the most important, he said.

"The subject matter is horrible, whether it is just physical abuse or sexual abuse," Williams said. "That topic is a horrible topic. And when you talk to a young child, they're embarrassed, and they don't want to talk to someone they don't know about the subject matter."

Decreasing the number of times a child recounts his or her story also can help the prosecution's case, Williams said. He said the defense attorney often will look for potential inconsistencies in the multiple descriptions the victim gives of the event to discredit the victim. By minimizing the number of statements, the defense's tactics also are

minimized, he said.

Through observing the child in the interview, police officers and attorneys for both sides often can determine if the child is telling the truth, Williams said.

He said knowing how a child will behave in court is helpful for all parties in determining a course of action. If the defense attorney views the video and decides the prosecution has a compelling case, the attorney might push for a plea bargain, he said.

"The defense attorney may look at it and tell their client, 'We can try and pick apart a child, but you don't score a lot of points with the court or the jury when you try and show a child in a bad light,'" Williams said.

He said a plea bargain ultimately could lead to the defense deciding the child's presence in court is unnecessary. He said that if the defense decides on a plea bargain because of the tape or the suspect's own confession, the system is better served.

"Justice is served quickly, and sometimes — this is going to sound

a little strange — but sometimes more important than [swift justice] is that you save the child from having to go through the court system," Williams said. "Although I believe in the court system, and it's a really great system, you can't ignore how tough it is on people."

Brian Krylowicz, director of University Counseling Services, said he agrees the proposed advocacy center will make the court process easier on children. He said it is difficult for any person to disclose something of an embarrassing nature that happened to him or her and have to repeat it multiple times to strangers. Krylowicz said it is also important to be able to obtain information from the child without influencing the child's story.

"The purest way is to ask it once with someone who is very well trained, very competent, who has built a very good rapport," Krylowicz said. "That allows for a lot more accurate storytelling, and it allows for the ability to get information shared once in the least intrusive way."



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