

Downtown businesses extend hours on 'Wonderful Wednesdays'

By Tara Marion

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas in Downtown Kalamazoo—especially on Wednesday evenings when over 80 merchants have extended their business hours by staying open until at least 7 p.m.

These downtown businesses include both restaurants and retailers, as well as institutions such as the Kalamazoo Public Library, Kalamazoo Valley Museum and Kalamazoo Institute of Arts.

Businesses that choose to extend their hours began their one-year commitment to this promotion called “Wonderful Wednesdays” on October 14.

Said Brian Sullivan, marketing manager of Downtown Kalamazoo Inc., “It’s all voluntary, but we are asking businesses that participate to give us a one-year commitment—so even beyond the holiday season, people will be able to find downtown merchants open Wednesday nights.”

It is expected that during the holiday season, Wonderful Wednesdays should increase the profitability of downtown merchants, but Sullivan added that even after the new year, it is hoped that Wonderful Wednesdays will continue to bring people downtown.

“We know that customers continually expect more and more from us as business owners, and we want to do everything we can to address these needs and serve these people.”

In the long run, he said, “I think the No. 1 reason (Wonderful Wednesdays) is beneficial for (retailers) is because it’s beneficial to their customers, and that’s what we’re here for.”

One local business owner who can vouch for the potential long-term success of this program is Doug Stevenson of Alfred E. Bike, 320 E. Michigan.

Stevenson told Sullivan that Alfred E. Bike is very busy on Wednesday nights. “It’s become a very important business time for him,” Sullivan said. “This isn’t a new thing for him, but again, his customers know he’s open late, and they take advantage of it.” Alfred E. Bike has had extended Wednesday evening hours for years.

Although Stevenson has been open on Wednesdays without the additional participation of fellow merchants, the concept behind Wonderful Wednesdays isn’t new to downtown. “The Wednesday evening shopping tradition in downtown Kalamazoo began prior to the installation of the pedestrian mall in 1959.” Explained Sullivan, “so for many years, downtown shoppers could count on finding their favorite stores open Wednesday nights.”

Now DKI and downtown merchants are “bringing together the old traditional downtown Kalamazoo with the new, vibrant Downtown Kalamazoo,” he said. In renewing traditions of the past, there is a nostalgic sense of community and it is combined with the new downtown—a center that is active, interesting and exciting—and the promotion brings it all together Wednesday evenings.

From relaxing after work with a massage at the YWCA’s Massage Works to shopping at stores like Gilmore’s and V&A Bootery to winding down your evening with a late dinner at Old Burdick’s Bar and Grill—downtown is great way to spend a midweek evening.

Take it from Santa and Mrs. Claus! The jolly old elf, his wife and their live reindeer took time out of their busy schedules this season to spend a Wednesday evening downtown on Nov. 11.

Sullivan said more and more surprises in the stores and on the streets of downtown Kalamazoo can be expected as Wonderful Wednesdays continue. Many musicians and entertainers have expressed an interest in performing that evening, he said, and DKI has welcomed them. Over the next year, Wednesday night will host a wide spectrum of performers—anything from choirs and street musicians to magicians, clowns and street painters.

To find out if your favorite stores are participating in Wonderful Wednesdays, just ask—or look for a Wonderful Wednesdays sticker displayed in their storefront window.

In the spirit of “Wonderful Wednesdays,” the following downtown businesses will be open longer on Wednesday evenings:

Acme Bedding
Alfred E. Bike
AndrewBeth Salons
Athena Book Shop & Café
Avante Salon
The Basket Case Gift Co.
Bimbo’s Pizza
B.J. Benjim’s Big & Tall
Blue Dolphin
Bogart’s Kazoo Kids
Bogart’s Teddy Bears & Toys
Burger King
Caffe Casa
C.G. & Company
Classic Fashions Lingerie
Climb Kalamazoo
Coney Island
Dena’s Gift Shop
Downtown Motel
Dragon Inn
Eye Clinic Optical Lab
Fitness Works
Flipside Records
Folio Hair Salon
Food Dance Cafe
Francois Bar, Seafood, Steakhouse & Bakery
Frank’s Shoe Parlor
Friends of the Library Bookstore
Gazelle Sports
Gerald E. Meyers, Goldsmith
Gilmore’s
Golden Needle Tailor Shop
Hall House Bed & Breakfast

Harvey's on the Mall
Hot-N-Now
Josephine's
Jungle Café & Coffee House
Kalamazoo Brewing Co.
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts
Kalamazoo Public Library
Kalamazoo Shell
Kalamazoo Valley Museum
Keggar's
Kilwin's Ice Cream & Chocolates
Kraftbrau
Massage Works
The Mercantile
Michigan News Agency
The Mole Hole
N.K. Action Sportswear
N.K. Boutique
Oggi The Gift Shoppe
Okun Bros. Shoes
Old Burdick's Bar & Grill
Olde Peninsula Brewpub & Restaurant
Orrin B. Hayes
Pandora's Books for Open Minds
Paris Audio
Pedals & Postings
Raven's Nest
Redwood & Ross
The Soup Kitchen
Subs-N-More
Subway Downtown
Terrapin Worldwide Imports
V&A Bootery
Van Sweden Jewelers
YWCA