

It's Just Easier Downtown

As the 2008 Holiday Season begins, shoppers, revelers, and tourists – as well as employees and residents – will notice several new operational and customer service changes intended to make it easier and more convenient to use downtown during the holiday season.

It's easier to shop for that special holiday gift thanks to the new extended hours that most downtown retailers and restaurants have adopted. Starting November 1st, many downtown retailers will extend their closing time until at least 6:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday and until at least 8:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday each week. Opening times will still vary depending upon the customary practices of the individual businesses. This change was recommended in the Downtown Retail Strategy and will continue through at least December 24th to make it more convenient for holiday shoppers to access downtown's unique and quality retailers. Leading the way in extending the hours of retail operations in downtown was Ever'man Natural Foods on West Garden Street. Beginning a month ago, Ever'man took the decision of the Downtown Retail Council to extend the hours of its members during the holiday season one giant step further. Starting October 1, 2008, Ever'man extended its closing time to 9:00 p.m. on Monday through Saturday of each week. If the results from the first month of extended closing times at Ever'man Natural Foods were any indication of how the change will be received by customers and visitors at other downtown retail establishments, many new and happier patrons are on the horizon.

Downtown will also be easier to get into and out of as a result of the new two-way traffic on Palafox Place and S. Baylen Street. The entire conversion process back to two-way traffic on these streets should be completed and carrying vehicles in both directions between Main Street and Garden Street by November 15th. Such a change to two major downtown streets will also make it much simpler and more convenient to move around downtown and for visitors to our community to find and access the offerings of downtown.

It'll also be easier to park your car when visiting a downtown business thanks to the freeing up of just over 400 curbside parking spaces during the day for use by holiday shoppers. The all day users that previously made it difficult for visitors, shoppers, and clients to park in front of or near their intended destination have moved to one of the thirteen public off-street parking lots that allow for longer term parking use. Additionally, over 2000 parking spaces that are totally free of cost have been created and/or identified for public use. Many downtown retailers also validate parking for customers at the Jefferson Street Parking Garage making the use of that facility free of cost as well.

Also new for Holiday 2008 will be a valet service in the first block of S. Palafox. Located in the mid-block parking bay directly in front of Will Call Sports Grill, Starbucks Billiards, and Jewelers Trade Shop, the Downtown Parking Management District will operate valet parking on Monday through Saturday each week through at least December 30th. Valet service will be available from 10:00 a.m. through 11:00 p.m. six days each week. There will be no cost to use the service for

the customers of many of the retailers and restaurants in that block with a validation. For all others, a flat charge of \$5.00 will apply.

With all of these operational and access enhancements, shopping, dining, celebrating, or visiting downtown just to see the holiday sights will be even easier this year. So what are you waiting for? We're saving a place for you. Come on over.

Franklin D. Kimbrough
Executive Director