

editor's message



Bloomington: Party Town?

We Bloomingtonians are proud of our town and its unique character. We talk a lot about character in Bloomington, and when we do, our “vibrant” downtown Square is often cited as the physical embodiment of what’s special. That is changing, however.

Not long ago, we had a nicely balanced mix of establishments in close proximity to our postcard-perfect courthouse. There was a large shoe store, the finest furniture store in the state, an old-time hobby shop, a world-class photography gallery, three galleries devoted to the works of local artists, another book shop, a women’s boutique, a knitting shop, a first-rate toy store, a bead store, a New Age gift shop, a kitchen store, a music store, and more. All were locally owned.

Like all things, businesses come into being and businesses die. But on the whole, we have lost far more retail businesses than we have gained. In their place, for the most part, are more bars and restaurants.

Some of the new places are worthy additions to the town, but that’s not the point. Our downtown is out of balance. There are more people on the Square at night than during the day. Many of our local retailers are fighting just to keep their doors open.

Local brick-and-mortar retailers have it rough. They have to compete with national chains, big box stores, the mall, catalog companies, and the internet. Downtown rents are high (in some cases, exorbitant) and the parking meters haven’t helped. But what’s most discouraging of all is that many

residents who take pride in the character of Bloomington never bother to come downtown.

Those who sell Bloomington as a great place to visit, hold a conference, or launch an IT start-up invariably tout our reputation as a special destination with a wonderful downtown. They know that reputation matters.

Unfairly, Indiana University once had the reputation as a party school. But with a downtown consisting mainly of bars, someday soon Bloomington may, quite fairly, be known as a party town.

We are the only people who can stop this trend. Here is a list of good, locally owned downtown retail businesses that I can personally vouch for: Tivoli Fashions, Gather, Andrew Davis Clothiers, à propos, Goods for Cooks, The Briar & The Burley, Lola & Co., Richardson Studio, Global Gifts, Elevated Citizen, Book Corner, Skirt & Satchel, Vance Music Center, MarDon Salon, Numa Aromatherapy, Elan Salon, O’Child, Bloomingfoods, Framemakers, Caveat Emptor, Spectrum Studio, Argentum Jewelry, Bloomington Salt Cave, By Hand Gallery, Royale Hair Parlor, and Volta Glass Studio.

If you care about character, and you haven’t visited one of these stores in a long time, come downtown, walk around, shop, and enjoy being in the heart of the place we call home.

Let’s keep Bloomington, Bloomington.

Malcolm Abrams
editor@magbloom.com