

BUSINESS COMMENTARY



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Association

Continued from 1E

Naples Mayor Bill Barnett wants to highlight what he sees as the downtown area's biggest challenge — the growing number of vacant spaces.

"When you see that space standing empty and you ask around ... why is this space still empty, the response that you get is, well the landlord might be totally out of touch ... or the problem is that they still think that you can get \$70 a square foot," he said. "They have to put businesses in there and they have to be conscious of what the going rate is today."

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DOWNTOWN NAPLES ASSOCIATION

Business group unveils new marketing plan

Merchants association also was to talk about downtown parking issues, future events and current membership at a Monday night meeting

By **KATY BISHOP**
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Naples' downtown heart has grown, and the Downtown Naples Association has big plans for it.

The merchants association, which represents 218 downtown businesses, planned to talk about their new marketing plan, downtown parking issues, future events and current membership at a Monday night meeting at the von Liebig Art Center in Naples.

The association's new "Destination Downtown: The Heart of Naples" advertising campaign will include the entire downtown district, from Fifth Avenue South, Third Street South and Crayton Cove to Tin City, Bayfront and the U.S. 41-10th Street area, said Michele Klinowski, Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce Visitor Information Center director.

The association has members from all those areas, including Tin City, which represents 34

merchants and joined a few weeks ago, she said.

"We're trying to market not just Fifth Avenue any more, but ... the entire downtown area," Klinowski said. "As the membership grows and as we all come together — and it's important for us to all come together, especially with the competition popping up in other areas — we ... market the entire area as a destination, not just one street."

Ads with the new slogan will be published in a number of location publications, Klinowski said. Other marketing plans that are in the works include four directional signs to guide visitors to the Downtown Information Center at 800 Fifth Ave. S., Suite 103, and a VIP card to draw visi-

tors to local businesses in summer 2008.

The VIP card program will be a partnership among the merchants association; the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce; The Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitor Bureau; and the Marco Island Area Chamber of Commerce.

Businesses will be able to choose to participate for free and decide what discount or deal they will give to VIP card holders, Klinowski said. The cards will be distributed at visitor centers and mailed in visitor information packets.

Future downtown events will include three art shows and a craft show, an Evening on Fifth on the second Thursday of every

month, and nine planned special events including a Halloween Party, Wine Tour and Christmas Walk.

The association also has been monitoring the progress of city parking garages and availability of spaces downtown, said Jim Goehler, association executive director.

"We think we have enough spaces for this season," Goehler said.

There are 150 spots at the site of the former Trail's End motel on 10th Street South that have been leased by the city, and others are under discussion, according to a map provided to the association by the city.