

Milagro

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Mochas and brewed coffees are the most popular items Downtown.

"We're starting to build a fairly regular clientele," he said. "We don't do Saturday because of the farmers market, but we're here Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., and sometimes an extra hour or more if people are coming around."

Digman said serving bakery items from the van on a regular basis would be the next logical step in building a business there.

Milagro has three bakers who supply the University Avenue shop, and sometimes the van, with bagels and bread.

"A gentleman from Marseilles does desserts and pastries for us. He just walked in one day – like a lot of things that happen at Milagro," he said.

"We will do it, because what it will take is me, being the boss, is getting my act together."

Let it be

Digman takes a wait-and-see attitude toward the possibility of expanding to a bricks-and-mortar shop Downtown.

"This location has a lot of advantages," he said. "And I don't have to invest in someone else's building."

"Not many Downtown buildings would meet food service requirements. They're older and they don't have the needed plumbing and drainage. To do it correctly would be very expensive."

Digman's coffee business has been a work-in-progress since he opened Mother's Day 1998 on University Avenue.

"It met a lot of criteria," he said. "It was near a big student population, had a lot of vehicle traffic and excellent parking. At the time there was no drive-thru, and we didn't have one for the first three or four years."

Milagro's shop and covered patio have become a mecca for coffee and tea lovers, including those with laptops.

Since 1971, Digman has owned a variety of businesses, including a laundromat. He also has worked as a private investigator, hospital administrator and heavy equipment mechanic.



Thomas Stover serves a morning wake-up cup to a regular from the customer service window of the van Tuesday, Oct. 29.

"Like everything I do, it's a great learning experience," he said of his newest venture.

Growing organically

"One of the things I've learned is about the dynamics of Downtown and the different interests – people who own buildings and businesses, people who like to be in the neighborhood, people who work for NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), the city and developers. There's way more interest than I ever thought," Digman said.

He believes Downtown, like his business, will grow organically.

He added it would be great if the arts community organizes to bring a number of mobile food vendors into the neighborhood.

"When we see the first long-term, well-run mom and pops come in and make the nut with reasonable rent and an understanding of business, we will see what is organic growing," he said. "It can't be forced."

"Once you start seeing regular traffic, you can expect at some point to see a little bodega where businesses and residents from the surrounding neighborhood can go to get a quart of milk, fresh fruit, cat litter, diapers, whatever, people will start to see Downtown as a viable, livable place."

Convention

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Denmark said.

He said the city has a comparative advantage for conventions and tourism in its winter, spring and summer weather not enjoyed by other parts of the country and not even by some other parts of the region.

"We would like to see the new management bring in more outside conventions," Mayor Pro Tem Sharon Thomas said Tuesday, Oct. 29. "That has always been the issue."

Thomas said although large-scale convention business declined during the recent recession, "there's plenty of market for regional conventions within a day's drive."

"I think the center hits a positive niche," she said.

Thomas advocated doing more advertising outside the city and working more with Las Cruces professional groups that have the potential to bring in conventions of their professional organizations.

Convention goers not only spend more in the city than local event attendees do, they also generate more revenue than the average leisure tourist – three times as much, according to the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau 2010 Annual Report.

A 2007 report from the Destination Marketing Association, prior to the onset of the current recession, described America's convention industry as a buyer's market suffering from excess capacity.

According to a more recent study by the hotel industry research and consulting firm HVS, convention attendance nationally declined from 126 million in 2000 to 86 million in 2010. Meanwhile, the amount of available convention space increased from 53 million to 70 million square feet.

Competition is stiff because the industry is mature, HVS stated.

The study reported demand is greatest for facilities 70,000 to 199,999 square feet (31 percent of total demand), while the next greatest demand is convention space the size of the 55,000-square-foot Las Cruces venue, 30,000-69,999 (29 percent of total demand).

Most groups holding conventions in the local venue draw 300-400 attendees, Hicks said. The facility can accommodate at least 800.

The city issued about \$26 million in bonds to build the center, according to Chris Faivre, media manager for the Las Cruces Convention & Visitors Bureau. A lodging tax recommended by the city's hotels pays the debt service.



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The following candidates will be on the ballot for the November 5 municipal election:

Councillor District 3	District 6
Olga Pedroza (I)	Cecelia H. Levatino
Bev Courtney	J. Mark Cobb
	Curtis J. Rosemond
District 5	Municipal Judge II
Gill M. Sorg (I)	Kieran F. Ryan (I)
David B. Roewe	Ben A. Longwill

For voting information call the Las Cruces City Clerk's office at (575) 541-2115.

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Build

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in southern New Mexico, the types of jobs it would create and how it would impact the local business community overall – and Mark Vasconcellos, who made a plea for "film friendliness" and how a simple change in attitude can bring big change and big money.

One area of concern that continued to have a presence during the presentation was the Film Liaison position, which has been vacant since late June. The question over whether or not the position should be part- or full-time has bogged the proceedings down to the point that many have wondered if the position will ever be filled. Each of the presenters, in their expositions, mentioned the importance of the position to the continued growth and forward momentum of the film industry.

Of the city councillors present, Nathan Small and Gill Sorg came across as the most receptive. This shouldn't come as any surprise considering their ongoing roles in the RFDAC. Small made note that "now is the opportune time to take action," but that patience would be necessary. The rest of the council appeared positive

overall, asking pertinent questions and coming across as genuinely interested.

The tough nut to crack has always been City Manager Robert Garza, who is known for playing his cards close to the chest. His announcement that the city is currently in search of an Economic Development director and, once that position has been filled, the film liaison will answer to that department, falls in line with RFDAC recommendations, which is a very good sign.

Even better, no budget adjustments were necessary owing to a vacancy in another department within the organization, which means, according to Garza, the position is ready to be filled once a director for Economic Development has been found.

Left to mull this information over, the assembled filmmakers were invited to step forward and give their testimonies. Representatives from the film-making union, local business people, concerned citizens and students took the opportunity presented to give comment. Overall it was a very upbeat presentation with heartfelt pleas going out in favor of a viable film industry.

So, what was the result? Small summed everything up by asking that a work session be called to address infrastructure. To the surprise of many,

Garza agreed, laying out his cards and ending the proceedings on an up note.

"We would be more than happy to schedule another work session," he said. "I would suggest we do it in January. Before we develop our budget for the next fiscal year, we do need to have topics like this on our work session calendar. We will tentatively schedule a follow-up and rely on the good people here today to bring in the numbers and the information we need, so we have something to build on."

History is a funny thing. We tend, for the most part, not to notice it while it's happening, mainly because we're too busy going about our own lives to take note of the inconsistencies. Unless it is heralded by expectation, like the first lunar landing, or unfolding slowly, like the riveting live footage being broadcast when the twin towers fell, it is a phenomenon best viewed in hindsight.

I would like to believe what took place in the city council chambers on Monday, Oct. 28, will have a significant impact on the Mesilla Valley for years to come.

Could it be called history in the making? Only time, and hindsight, will tell.