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Mall went smoke-free one year ago

Merchants have mixed feelings on smoking ban

Some of the merchants at Georgetown Marketplace are pleased the mall went smoke-free a year ago, but others aren't.

Darlene Woods, manager of Coffee Time, said going smoke-free has impacted her business dramatically.

"It has been negative," said Woods. "Sales have gone way down from it."

She said sales have dropped about

75 per cent since the ban was implemented last April and employee hours had to be cut because of the decline in business. She said Coffee Time's head office is considering relocating the store.

Sarfraz Moosa, owner of International News, said the smoking ban hasn't been good for his business, which is mainly cigarette and magazine sales.

He said he couldn't say how much the ban has impacted his business because he has only owned it for a year.

George Mitros, owner of Mr. Sub in the mall, said he noticed a decline in sales in April and May immediately after the ban was introduced last spring. He said some of his previous smoking customers have stayed away since the ban came into effect.

Mark Galsworthy, assistant manager of Radio Shack, said since smoking was banned he has noticed a lot less people in the mall. He said, however, business has remained the same as before.

Other mall tenants welcomed the smoke-free policy.

John Valentine, owner of The Coffee Grind International, said he sees a smoke-free mall "as a great positive."

Valentine, who took over the store in March 1998, said the change has presented a "huge opportunity" and that fresh new ideas from merchants are needed.

Valentine said instead of just selling coffee, which many smokers often bought to accompany their cigarette, he is offering a healthier menu, including a sandwich bar, fruit and granola

bars. Sometime this summer he intends to have a computer available so his customers can surf the Internet.

"A lot of young families and seniors are starting to come back to the mall," said Valentine.

He said sales at The Coffee Grind which he didn't own at the time, were down 20 per cent after the ban was introduced, but his sales in March compared to last March were up 2 per cent.

Frank Biasini, manager of Sooters said business at his store has "stayed pretty much the same" since the ban was introduced.

"Overall I'm happy they did the (ban smoking)," said Biasini. "I used to get a lot of complaints from customers who said they didn't want to come down to this end of the mall because of the amount of smoke."

"It has definitely been a positive thing for us," said Heidi Coleman, assistant manager of Victorian Shop located adjacent to the food court.

"We've had customers come in and say this is so much nicer." She said some customers told her in the past they wouldn't come into the shop because they had to walk through the smoking area.

Coleman said her business is up over last year, but couldn't pinpoint it directly to the smoking ban.

"It hasn't affected the mall tenants either way," said mall manager Herminia Henderson.

"I get a lot of positive remarks from customers," added Henderson who said the smoking ban "is here to stay."

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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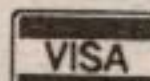
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