

Local merchants braved weather and economy in 2010

By ROGER BUTTON BUSINESS COLUMNIST VENICE GONDOLIER

The year 2010 started with unseasonably cold weather, but enthusiastically, the Venice MainStreet Inc. launched a promotional campaign, "Discover Venice, Florida."

Merchants agreed the weather affected downtown business activity, then publicity following the mid-April Gulf oil spill put a damper on summer business as Canadians, northerners and Europeans stayed away.

The brighter spots are ongoing enthusiasm of entrepreneurs to achieve the American dream with the opening this year of more Mom-and-Pop start-ups. Unfortunately some fell by the wayside, but more braved the depressive economy and are looking for brighter growth next year.

Here is a glance at changes which have taken place during the past 12 months.

Local boy David Joyner launched his family insurance business, Goodwill opened a bookstore, two ex-Publix managers opened Top Crop Produce, while in Nokomis gas ceased flowing from the tanks at Sunoco.

Bella Brezza opened in the former Casey's Grill and there were celebrations for the opening of Florida Shores Bank headquarters.

Venice Regional Medical Center opened an outpatient surgery facility at Venice Health Park and Gulf Coast Medical Group announced plans for an urgent care center in South Venice.

Gas was scarce on the island with only Citgo on Business 41 open; Island BP at Venice Avenue Bridge shuttered and the Shell station by the hospital closed for installation of new tanks. The former Chrysler dealership renamed Venice Autoland had closed and downtown Meows and Growls started closing sales.

Legacy Trail bridges nearing completion were vandalized, but users learned they were to get an overpass on the Bypass.

The Definas returned to reopen their popular Italian restaurant in South Venice, Publix Super Markets received an accolade from Fortune magazine and West Coast Mattress opened in the former Wolf Camera on the Bypass.

Bob Johnson announced Bob's Twist 'N' Shake, an icon of the '60s, was opening on the Bypass and reduced speed signs appeared on Route 681, the Venice connector to I-75.

With Valentine's Day approaching Nifty Nic Nacs offered love guns to shoot cupids while scuba divers sought sharks teeth with the new Megalodon Charters at Fisherman's Wharf and Animal Alley Grooming on Miami Avenue offered bird, cat and dog detailing.

Former Sonny's owner Mike Levine offered the acceptance of credit cards at the reopening of the upgraded Salvation Army's large retail store on the Bypass. The former Osprey Inn is Bentley's Resort Hotel and downtown Summerville at Venice became Emeritus at Venice.

Enthusiast Anne Graf wanted a Disc Golf Course began her campaign which was realized a few months later. Downtown the free valet parking scheme was extended to six days. Two young former pilots remodeled, renamed then opened Flying Fish Outfitters in Nokomis.

Doubling in size Island Treasures moved to Miami Avenue; Used Appliance & Furniture opened on the Bypass and downtown merchants announced their spring promotion, Hot Sales in Cool Stores.

Hailed as a home to the end, A Banyan Residence opened on Base Avenue and at I-75 Jacaranda interchange the Venice Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott opened. Holiday House Motel on the Bypass was placed in receivership in mid-March.

Creative Framing celebrated 29 years in South Venice while new owners acquired Sunset Lake Village Assisted Living on Jacaranda Boulevard. Following seven years preparation the Duke Family opened their new Classic Creations in Diamonds & Gold near RaceTrac in South Venice.

Maria Smielowitz and Mitch opened Mad Dogs Hot Dogs near the Movie Theaters while in Nokomis Becky and Roger Hart opened Scented Swan Soap & Candle Company.

As season came to an end downtown merchants reported business had been significantly affected by the coldest winter in 60 years, unaware what they were about to experience in December.

Greg Silvia, owner of Althea's restaurant, held a benefit dinner for local businesswoman Ruth Ann Dearbury who suffered serious injuries following a road accident.

William Wemesfelder debuted his prototype Snorkel Bug at Blackburn Point; downtown Zak's Clothing and Gifts returned while in South Venice the Curves for Women in Venice closed.

Grady Hough and his team at Hough & Co. celebrated 50 years and Hertz returned to the Bypass. Builder Pat Neale acquired remnants of the foreclosed J&J Properties portfolio promising new homes for Sawgrass and Lakes of Jacaranda.

Jeff O'Berry and Tom DeVol owners of Nifty Nic Nacs sang for charity in New York. New owners acquired both downtown Fifi's Fine Resale Apparel & Home Interiors and Beach boutique opened in Venice Commons.

Holiday Inn Express at Commercial Court was the fourth Venice hotel to go into foreclosure, but continued under new ownership.

Faye Miles, 102, the oldest active businesswoman, who owned the downtown El Patio Hotel, died. Venice High School graduate Patrick Levman and his brother opened South Venice Seafood. The International Theater Festival completed a very successful program at Venice Theater and Tervis Tumbler boosted its booming business.

The former Days Inn reopened as Travelers Inn at Shamrock Boulevard the Pham family opened a second salon, Venice Nails & Spa at Jacaranda Crossing. Buffet restaurant Dimitri's closed for the second time on the Bypass.

It was Christmas in July again when downtown merchants organized a shopping extravaganza weekend.

Following nine months of delays excitement was buzzing downtown as Pineapples opened and nearby Destination Beach the rent-it-all unique boutique beach store arrived at West Venice Avenue.

The city hit the headlines when Where to Retire magazine nominated it as Florida Gulf Coast's walkable town. Good news from PGT who reported increased sales for the first time since 2006, and CounterBalance Corporation also of North Venice who were awarded new U.S. Army contracts.

A Bostonian opened Mazzone's Italian Deli downtown. The 167-room Holiday House Motel was acquired for \$1.

Shuttered 21-year-old Miller's Florists was acquired at auction by Always An Occasion of S. Nokomis Avenue.

The “Bypass Burger” heralded the opening of Jackson’s American Grill in the former downtown Dream Café and Center for Sight introduced their do-it-yourself EyeSite test kiosk in Sweetbay’s Jacaranda Boulevard Supermarket.

Family-operated Simple Elegance Under \$20, and the upgraded Cassariano’s restaurant opened downtown. Twenty year old landmark Brides of Venice closed. Big Toy Storage Depot opened in the former Cox Lumberyard on Center Road.

The Study Center celebrated 15 years and Affordable Golf Cars opened in Nokomis. Twenty-five years after leaving the island, Gar Reese returned Moody’s Agency to Business 41. Ande’s Cupcakes & More opened downtown.

On the Bypass, Jim Purdy acquired and reopened Ivy Steak House Restaurant and Dee Baker opened Dee Ziner Cakes & Pastries retail store. Stanley Dean brought his team back to their former renovated offices on Tamiami Trail and Des Jardins merged with Hough & Co. Employing 75 local people, the big arches, McDonald’s, opened a new restaurant in South Venice.

Using health to create wealth, Rick Fishman and Kevin Linguard launched ProHealth Products and AT&T opened a new store in South Venice. Le Petit Jardin Café re-opened in Galleria on East Venice Avenue and Sandy’s Pet Boutique on the Bypass. Diva Clothier made a five-year move to South Nokomis Avenue.

Norma Jean’s Sports Bar & Grill on the Bypass reopened, tripling in size following major renovations. From the island Mid-Western Meats reopened in South Venice and a new feature downtown is Sunshine Boyz Island Shoppe.

Café Italia debuted in the former Bella Brezza, Dollar City opened in Venice Village Shoppes. Fishman & Associates celebrated 25 years in the kitchen design business. Thirty-year-old downtown business Needlepoint Ivy continues with new owner Linda Seiber.

PGT Industries consolidated by closing their North Carolina facility and moving everything to Venice. Tervis Tumbler announced major managerial re-organization as they target \$500 million revenues for 2015.

Bill Buck Jr., owner of Bill Buck Chevrolet, died in December.

The year ended as it had begun with a new promotion, “We Love Venice,” designed by Gregg Clark, owner of Destination Beach. It was launched with local merchants by newly elected Mayor John Holic.

Unfortunately the cold weather also returned with more severity; however shoppers enjoyed the festivities and services of merchants throughout the Venice area.

Many stores and businesses have opened and are leading us out of what has been described as the worst recession since the Great Depression. They deserve mention, but unfortunately we are denied by space from mentioning all of them. Happy new year to the residents, shoppers, tourists and merchants who provide excellent service to everyone in paradise