

Festival a boon for shops

By JOYCE MAY

The Red Poppy Festival last weekend drew some 60,000 guests to the Square and boosted sales for downtown merchants.

The exact economic impact is difficult to nail down absent a formal study, which the city did not commission this year.

In 2014 — the last year a firm was hired to gather data — the three-day annual event presented a \$2.5 million boon, Carl Miller, Convention and Visitor's Bureau manager, said Monday.

Downtown merchants surveyed Thursday reported a steady stream of customers throughout the weekend.

Bracing for the flood of visitors, businesses brought on extra staff, made sure their shelves were well stocked and stayed open late to accommodate the crowds.

Patty Watson, a fashion consultant with The Exchange, an upscale consignment shop on the north side of the Square, reported increased sales.

"Financially, it was awesome. We did very well," Ms. Watson said.



"We had one of the busiest weekends that we've had in a long time."

Usually at such events, Ms. Watson stands outside handing out coupons to draw customers into the store. Not so this time. The business left its front door open and customers flowed in.

"We were non-stop," said Ms. Watson, a self-described people person.

"People were in a festive

move. They were wanting to shop and buy."

The business stayed open late every night of the festival. Vendors who lease space at the store did well, Ms. Watson said.

Poppy and Texas-themed merchandise were hot sellers at The Exchange and at Artisans and Antiques, a vendor shop on the southeast corner of the Square.

"Anything poppy-oriented, all

Continued on 5A

Continued from 1A

our poppy pictures, anything with a poppy on it sold really well this weekend," said Russ Dickson, who owns the store with his wife Linda.

The shop, which has been in business two-and-a-half years, leases space to 20 local vendors including artists, artisans and antique dealers.

It has seen a steady, slight increase in festival weekend sales year over year, Mr. Dickson said.

"Business was solid. The folks through the store, traffic, was very good and sales volume was good," he said.

"Everybody had a good time. I think the families love the whole atmosphere that's put on down here. I think everybody had a great time, just you and 65,000 of your closest friends."

Sales were hot at Mikey V's Hot Sauce Shop on the east side of the Square and not just from the ghost pepper and ha-

banero-laced goodies the year-old business offers.

"It went really well. We saw a lot of people, probably more than last year," co-owner Tanya Valencia said.

"Compared to last year, we did make a little bit more money."

The store sold ice cream, water and sodas on the sidewalk outside its doors and customers, particularly those with children to buy for, expressed their appreciation for the reasonable prices, Ms. Valencia said.

Water and sodas went for \$1 each.

"They appreciated that we didn't charge triple the amount," Ms. Valencia said.

"We would tell them, 'We are not in the water business. We are in the hot sauce business. We just want to keep our customers cool.'"

Ms. Valencia and husband Mike Valencia, who is the genius behind the store's signa-

ture line of sauces, had family helping them.

"We had probably four times as many people as we usually do to look over everything, answer customers' questions, refill sampling stations," Ms. Valencia said.

Jemme Lynn Wilks, owner of La Bella Casa on the south side of the Square, described the weekend as "unbelievable."

"We were working two weeks before, organizing, pricing, contacting vendors, making sure that we were fully stocked," Ms. Wilks said.

"We worked really hard to make sure everything was in place."

The shop offered wine glasses hand-painted by members of Women Helping Others, of which Ms. Wilks is a member, and will donate a percentage of the sales to local charities.

"Lots of ladies were painting wine glasses into the wee hours of the night," she said.

Overall, the festival had a positive impact on the shop.

"Nothing negative, not when you can make money," Ms. Wilks said.

Kay Briggs, owner of Pink Poppy ARTisans Boutique, sported tennis shoes and worked long hours alongside a full sales staff.

"It's a very positive impact on our business. It always is," Ms. Briggs said.

"I don't think there's a negative. We just have to be prepared."

Karim Allani, owner of Roots, brought in extra staff and offered a limited menu to help handle the crowds.

Mr. Allani also stocked up on beer, including domestics the business does not usually offer, and sold it and wine in front of the restaurant.

Next year, Roots will have an ATM machine and offer branded Koozies, Mr. Allani said.

Madison Simmons contributed to this report.