

**SIGN EXCITEMENT !**

Written by By Kevin Opsahl Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 12 March 2021 03:09

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### **Gallup businesses make themselves seen, at a bargain**

Walk around downtown Gallup these days and you might notice some signs of change.

Signs —as in what typically appear on business storefronts.

American Bar has a neon sign that's hard to miss, with its name embossed in red cursive and uppercase print that juts out from a partially blue-painted facade. Above it is another sign (with a front and back) depicting the American flag.

City Electric Shoe Shop tells people it sells boots, belts and moccasins with a long, colorful mural that includes illustrations of a cowboy and Indian on the side of its building on south Third Street.

Tandy's Auto Repair and Exhaust boasts a sign standing tall over U. S. Highway 66. Just below it is an LED display showing a black hot rod doing a pop-a-wheelie.

These examples — and more — were all made possible by the Gallup Business Improvement District. BID uses a small fee property owners within the district have agreed to pay, along with a match from the City of Gallup, to create a general fund. The fund is used for economic development projects supported by the BID.

Its director, Francis Bee, said BID has had substantially less money to help businesses ever since the city council met mid-2020 and made emergency reductions in spending. But one program that has remained — and stayed popular — is the sign program, in which BID agrees to pay 75 percent of the cost of a new sign, up to a cap of \$5,000.

He explained how the program works, saying any new sign is born out of an agreement

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between the business owner and the owner of the building. Once a new sign idea is sketched out and a cost proposal is made, the BID is contacted. Ultimately, the BID board must review the grant request form, invoice, and photos of the sign to agree to give grant funding to any business that wants to utilize the program.

BID does not do audience research to gauge the effectiveness of the new signs, Bee said, and he's not sure how much impact they have on people during the pandemic.

But he does believe businesses with more attractive signs will get more attention and be more likely to prosper.

"During normal times, the signs made tourists, visitors and residents aware of the existence of a business, as is the case with any sign anywhere," he wrote in an email. "Signing is a branding exercise and invitation to visit the business. No invitation usually means fewer visitors to the establishment. A compelling sign will increase foot traffic."

Years before the pandemic, City Electric Shoe Shop and Silver Dust Trading Company were recipients of the BID sign program — except neither chose something traditional. Instead, longtime Gallup artist Ric Sarracino painted murals on the sides of their respective buildings.

Silver Dust's mural is varied, depicting a train on a railroad, scenes from a Native American village and a cowboy journey via horse-drawn carriage.

It all came about two years ago, when Donovan Ferrari, owner of Silver Dust Trading Company, saw new signs going up around town and wondered what was going on. Then, Bee told him about the sign program and how it worked.

"I thought it would help with the aesthetics of downtown to help my building stand out more," he said. "It's right here on the corner of Second and [U. S. Highway] 66, which is probably one of the busiest intersections in Gallup. ... It has attracted a lot of business."

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Not only that, the mural has prevented graffiti from taking over the side of the building — and there hasn't been any in two years, according to Ferrari. The idea that the sign could be a deterrent from vandalism is one of the reasons he chose to have a new sign in another form, as opposed to hardware.

"It's an eye-catcher," Ferrari said. "I see people taking pictures all the time next to it, especially tourists."

Silver Dust Trading Company's new sign sends a message that the store has respect for downtown and is working to create a better one, he said.

Gallup Mayor Louis Bonaguidi said the shoe shop — the third oldest business in the city — had the original mural repainted before he became mayor and utilized funds from the sign program. The old mural was covered up by a metal facade some years after Bonaguidi's father opened the shoe shop in 1924.

"We had an electronic sign that was up on the wall," Bonaguidi said. "Our winds in the spring are pretty strong and basically knocked the sign down. That's when we decided rather than have the same situation, let's try a painted sign. That's a big wall, so you want to utilize it as much as you can."

He said the business got back about \$600 thanks to the BID sign program.

Bonaguidi offered thoughts on his hopes for other businesses that get funds from the sign program.

"We try to encourage the other businesses ... to put more money into their building[s], because it makes the community look that much better," he said.

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