

Downtown Arlington businesses thrive on competition

By Johnathan Silver Special to *The Shorthorn* | Posted: Tuesday, September 18, 2012 8:39 pm

A we're-all-in-this-together mentality perhaps best describes the boom in downtown Arlington activity in just the last few years. Restaurants in the last two years are popping up throughout downtown, and it's much to the delight of mainstays and city leaders.

Mellow Mushroom Pizza Bakers opened last September.

Kim Slawson, Mellow Mushroom franchise owner, told *The Shorthorn* in April 2011 that she and her husband thought of a Center Street location as the perfect spot for their second restaurant. She said the university's proximity to the new business added to the decision.

"This is a great corridor," she said. "How can it get any better than this?"

Business has been great since then, said Patrick Benavides, the restaurant's kitchen manager. Though he didn't know how many people the Arlington Mellow Mushroom has served, Benavides did note that business is close to matching that of the Fort Worth Mellow Mushroom, which has been open for about six years.

Mellow Mushroom's being on the downtown scene is grouped with the arrival of other establishments in the last year, including Old School Pizza and Suds on Abram Street, The Grease Monkey Burger Shop on N. Mesquite Street and Flying Fish on Abram Street. Many agree that the university environment, the campaign to be a college town and the city's efforts to animate or revitalize downtown alone has led to the growth in the last few years.

There isn't a negative reaction to more competition, said Bradi Carney, co-owner of American/traditional restaurant Tin Cup, which has been a city mainstay.

"The more business you bring to downtown, the better for all businesses in downtown," she said

When J. Gilligan's opened shop in 1979, in terms of a concentrated customer demographic, there was just UTA, said Randy Ford, J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill owner.

More than 30 years later, the bar and grill has community confidence and much history, going from a small restaurant heavily dependent on the college customer to being a go-to place for much of the UTA and Arlington communities. Now the establishment, known for its Irish nachos, is also a place providing shuttle service to Cowboys Stadium, wedding parties and reunions.

These restaurants – newer and older – are all in the business of advancing the downtown area. These restaurants work together through organizations such as the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and the

Downtown Arlington Management Corporation.

When more restaurants started in downtown, Ford admits he was a leery. But the feeling has subsided, adding that more business is good for the city and makes owners and managers maintain quality and stay competitive in service.

UTA also adds to the development of the downtown area, not only by its presence and thousands of people who are potential customers, but thanks to the College Park District, which houses multiple venues for entertainment and dining. New restaurants at College Park include GRIP Mediterranean Grill, Pie Five Pizza Co., Coolberry Frozen Yogurt, Pho Xpress and MAVS Sports Grill.

University leaders hope UTA and Arlington community members find a hub for student life and entertainment in the district, university spokeswoman Kristin Sullivan noted in May.

College Park District is similar to what other top-tier institutions have, she said.

“World-class universities have vibrant campuses and campus life,” she told *The Shorthorn*.

Such collaboration emphasizes the economic clout UTA community members have and the potential Arlington has to become a major city and further stand out on its own as it sits, not rests, in between two economic and cultural heavyweights in North Texas.

@utashorthorn

editor.shorthorn@uta.edu