

Sisters merchants feel winter's chill

By Steve Kadel
Correspondent

While businesses that sell winter clothing or other cold-season necessities have done well in recent weeks, the prolonged cold snap and heavy snowfall has played havoc with other Sisters companies.

Many customers simply stay home when the temperatures plunge and the streets become icy, several business owners told *The Nugget* this week.

"It's been pretty dead the last few days," said Crystal Gomez, a waitress at Takoda's Restaurant and Lounge. "Our regulars keep us going in the winter."

Lots of skiers stopped by Takoda's early in the season, she said, but their numbers have declined as road conditions deteriorated. Gomez said the drop-off in customers has been worse recently than during other winters.

Mitch Mansfield, who owns Sisters Olive and Nut Co. with his wife Julie, said the recent weather had a big effect.

"It kicked us in the head," he said.

Although Mansfield said snow in December gave the town "a festive feel," he acknowledged that business activity routinely slows during the winter. He said the recent situation "hasn't been devastating" and is something local merchants learn to deal with.

"We've been at it for nine years," Mansfield said. "You stuff the mattress and hope you make it until May."

He acknowledged that road conditions have often prevented him from opening the store on time.

"It doesn't matter because customers can't get here anyway," Mansfield said with a chuckle.

Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce board president

Chris Wilder said his firm — Sisters Log Furniture and Home Decor — had a very busy year in 2016 but the recent weather has slowed the pace.

"It's a tough start to 2017," said Wilder, who has occasionally sent employees home early when storms are anticipated. Like other businesses, Wilder's firm has closed on some days due to bad weather.

He credited local business owners for working hard to keep sidewalks shoveled for shoppers' safety.

Not only has Sisters Country been hit by snow and cold temperatures, but the same thing has happened in the Willamette Valley, reducing the number of out-of-town shoppers, Wilder noted.

"This is my 11th year here and this (winter) has been tougher than most," he said. "The costs to operate businesses keep on coming whether customers walk



PHOTO BY STEVE KADEL

Mitch Mansfield, owner of Sisters Olive and Nut Co., says the severe winter weather has reduced the number of customers at his store.

through the door or not."

At Los Agaves Mexican Grill, owner Jimmy Fernandez estimated his business has been down by 80 percent during the past month.

"It has been very difficult, and there's nothing we can do," said Fernandez, who has been forced to reduce some staff members' hours.

The same thing happened at Martolli's pizzeria, where clerk Emily Skalda said she has lost some of her weekend hours due to a drop in business.

Likewise, Ashley Crawford of The Depot Café said there's little business done on days when a snowstorm hits.

"But after the storms, things really pick up," she said.

Sisters Market and Eatery has lost a few customers during the bad weather while gaining others. Clerk Jim Gladden said contractors don't stop by when the snow flies, but plowing crews help

make up for that loss.

When school is canceled, the market and eatery loses money from high school students, which Gladden called "a really good crowd" on most days.

One business owner who has smiled through the rough weather is Sue Leek, owner of Mackenzie Creek Mercantile, which stocks everything from stocking caps to winter socks and even snowshoes.

The 53-year Sisters resident said she can only recall two years when the area received more snow than it has this winter. The snowfall has helped keep her cash register ringing.

"I have had a very good cold weather period because people realized I have this gear," she said.

Whatever their business, merchants in Sisters all have one thing in common: They depend on local trade to get through the winter — especially a hard one.



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Sisters Airport moved tons of snow, including removal from roofs of vulnerable structures.



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