

BROADWAY

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economy has kept private business from moving into the three-block long space.

Today, 10 of 33 storefronts in the old mall are empty, a gallery space is up for lease, an one business is holding a moving sale. Pedestrians move quickly on the wide, smooth sidewalks and young people asking for change often sit on the decorative benches.

Though business is slow, things are improving. Business owners said their customers have better access to stores because Broadway is open to traffic. Crime has also dropped on the three blocks between Oak Street and Charnelton Street. Calls to the Eugene Police Department from those blocks have dropped by 42 percent since the street opened, from 1,092 calls in 2001 to 637 calls in 2003.

"Business is better since Broadway opened up, but you know the economy went down hill since they did that," said Makyadath Lazar, owner of Lazar's Bazar. He said he thinks Broadway will eventually be a thriving street, but not for another 10 or 20 years.

"The downtown is not a big business center anymore," he said. "It's hanging in there. It's just most of the businesses in here are not doing that well. It's a little sick."

He added that public perceptions about the safety and vitality of the area have improved, and people are more willing to go to Broadway.

"I wanted it open because that is the main blood supply," Lazar said. "When it was closed, it was like a closed door. When it opened, it got cleaner and safer."

Greg Fleener, owner of Cafe Paradiso at 115 W. Broadway, said he also supported the opening of Broadway.

"I see a lot of encouraging things happening," Fleener said. "I think the opening of the street is just the start. There's a lot more work to be done."

Work on opening the street started in

2000 after city officials proposed opening the downtown mall as part of their "Vision for Greater Downtown Eugene." The plan envisioned Broadway as a "Great Street": a place that draws people downtown for shopping, eating and socializing.

Designers incorporated wide sidewalks, narrow lanes to slow traffic, raised sidewalk crossings and added a multitude of decorative elements into the street. The Eugene City Council also passed an ordinance requiring street-level friendly design on most new construction.

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"All we could control in the environment was how we designed the street," the city's Project Manager Denny Braud said. "We recognize that it is not quite great yet."

Developing in downtown is more expensive than in other areas of the city, Braud said. The city gives developers some incentives, such as tax breaks for housing projects to encourage downtown construction. The City Council will also be voting on a new development plan for all of downtown in the coming weeks, which includes extending the focus on Broadway all the way from Hilyard Street to Lincoln Street.

Those plans, however, do little to change current economics. In 2003, Oregon tied with Michigan for the highest unemployment rate in the nation at 7.6 percent. Though some new businesses have moved onto Broadway in that time, there hasn't been a scramble to take over the many

empty storefronts.

Downtown Eugene Inc. Executive Director Russ Brink said downtown vacancies are not the city's responsibility at this point. The city has some tools to lure business to the area, but its hands are tied by the bad economy as well, he said.

"The private property owners along Broadway need to make some improvements," he said. "In the end, it is private investors having the confidence that they're going to have a positive rate of return."

Two local businessmen, Tom Connor and Don Woolley, own four largely or completely empty buildings that dominate Broadway, including the former Bon Marché and Symantec Corp. buildings.

"They own a lot of property and they control a lot of what could happen in terms of redevelopment," Braud said.

Neither Connor nor Woolley could be reached for comment, but Braud said the pair's plans to turn one of the buildings into apartments were scrapped because of high costs.

"They need to do something, but the economic conditions aren't such to motivate them," Braud said.

Values on Broadway remain low. Rents are some of the lowest in the downtown area, Braud said, despite the fact that a few blocks away renters pay some of the highest costs in town. The low rent discourages new projects on Broadway because developers can't recoup the costs of their investment.

The layout of buildings also keeps business owners away, Braud said. Spaces are long and narrow, while most business owners are looking for shallow and open spaces.

"A lot of the problem has to do with real estate," Braud said.

He feels confident, however, that things will improve in the next 10 years.

"I think there is a recognition that downtown is on the edge of revitalizing," Braud said. "We're just not there yet."

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SHOW

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like hearing the Cramps sped up to maximum RPM.

To top it off, they're also great musicians. It's difficult to play this loud and fast and still be precise, but this band's songs cut like machetes. Pulling together a wide range of old school rock 'n' roll styles and filtering them through horror movie imagery, the Sawyer Family's trash compactor approach to rock is rather invigorating. It's also refreshing to hear a band that sings as much about dismemberment as they do about relationships.

Band number three was the first out-of-town act, Seattle's Boss Martians. I know who they are and where they're from because the lead singer mentioned it no less than seven times before the set was over. After awhile, it began to feel like they had to constantly affirm this fact to themselves, like a mantra, in order to keep playing.

Have you ever noticed how in movies, whenever there is a battle of the bands going on, the winning band always plays this cheesy, life-affirming style of rock? That's what the Boss Martians sounded like. They have the power pop thing down cold, sure, but that might be part of the problem. For all their catchy new wave melodies and guitar crunch, everything tended to sound alike. The band started to come alive during the last few songs, but never really built on the momentum.

Last up was Throw Rag from Los Angeles. Playing nothing but the most grinding trash punk, the band is full of pure rock 'n' roll decadence. Captain Sean-Doe, Throw Rag's lead singer, comes off like an over-baked Johnny Rotten impersonator on a bad day, while back-up singer and washboard player Jacko seems to revel in the role of a total goon.

The band didn't miss a beat during their breathless 45-minute set, playing some of the dirtiest rock anyone is likely to hear this side of the Butthole Surfers. It says a lot that the usually passive WOW Hall audience was actually showing signs of movement below the neck, meaning that this band has definitely got something groovy going for them.

It would be nice to see Throw Rag rise to some semblance of popularity on the national music scene, but it's probably just wishful thinking. Bands this low down and dirty tend to stay low to the ground.

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