

Roadwork angers retailers

Business declines as Bell reconstruction project drags on

By Jeff Nelson
Special to Community

SUN CITY — Tenants of a shopping center at 99th Avenue and Bell Road say they've had enough of a major road reconstruction project on Bell Road.

"It's killing us," said Pam Borland, owner of Viva La Card and Prestige Collections in the Promenade Shopping Center.

"People-wise, we're definitely not getting the people coming through our doors that we had in the past," she said. "There can be hours of no one coming through the door."

Borland isn't alone in her frustration with the Bell Road project, which has limited traffic and access to businesses on Bell Road since construction began July 26.

It's scheduled for completion late next month.

Representatives of Pulice Construction Inc., the project contractor, said the merchants simply don't realize how large of a project it has been.

The Promenade Shopping Center, which sits in the

March isn't shaping up much better, Berlin said.

Berlin said someone at the county needs to realize that when the businesses in the county suffer, the county suffers too, because it counts on sales tax revenue from the stores.

Like many of the business owners contacted in the center, Berlin has a poor opinion of the way in which the county has handled the project.

He is particularly angry with the timing of the construction, saying it has taken place during the busiest season for the business.

Many of the small businesses rely heavily on sales during the fall and winter months to stay open, said Arnold Doyschen, owner

of Promenade Travel and Accessories.

The Sun Cities population is at its peak in the fall and winter months.

Doyschen said construction on the project should have started in May or June and continued through the summer months — the slowest time of the year for area businesses.

Having construction take place this winter has been a major blow to his store's bottom line, he said.

"It's hurt our business," Doyschen said, estimating that business is down 25 to 30 percent from this time last year.

Gareth Lewis, spokesman for Pulice Construction, said the project has required the installation of

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Pam Borland

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middle of the construction area, has been hit particularly hard by the project, says Jan Binder, marketing director for the center's owner, Westcor Partners.

Many people are just avoiding the torn-up area all together, she said, and patronizing businesses elsewhere.

Gene Berlin, owner of the Pants Rack store, said his shop has seen an increase in sales every year since he opened eight years ago. Last month, business was down 11 percent, he said.

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new medians, piping, culverts and pavement.

If he were a merchant, he said, he probably wouldn't be as concerned with that as with his bottom line. "That's why it has not been going as fast as people had hoped it would," he said.

Lewis said the construction company and the county is just as interested in wrapping the project up as quickly as possible. He said it costs them money to be there.

He said the construction company explained what was planned before construction began.

Merchants say the county should have met with the merchants to hear their opinions before they decided on a construction schedule, not after.



Nancy Engebretson / Staff photographer

Arnold Doyschen, owner of Promenade Travel and Accessories, says road construction, which has kept patrons away from shopping centers on Bell Road, should have been done during the summer — the slowest time of the year for area businesses.