

Business owners talk shop

7TH DISTRICT: Companies share economic concerns with Chamber of Commerce and city officials at Monday 'caravan' event.

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Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga, left, joins Reginald Harrison, B&B Hardware owners Lola and Tom Barnes, and Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce members Randy Gordon and Blake Christian at the Barnes' store Monday. The group met with the 7th District business community. (Scott Smeltzer / Staff Photographer)

LONG BEACH - Surrounded by a stock of vintage light-switch plates and glass knobs Monday, B&B Hardware owner Tom Barnes spoke about having to pay false alarm fines and hefty credit-card service fees.

"People come in here and they buy a \$3 item and they use their credit card and every time I use that machine, it's a cost," said

Barnes, who expects to pay \$400 to \$500 a month to run his credit card machine.

The costs are small but add up big for small-business owners like Barnes, whose business at 929 E. Wardlow Road is down 25 percent from last year.

"We cut back on labor and have done everything we can to stay," said Barnes, who drums up business by attending events and meetings in Long Beach's historic neighborhoods. "I think we're going to be OK, but I hope the election gives us more confidence in the economy."

The economy's impact on their small businesses was the main topic of discussion for Barnes and other 7 th District business owners, who met with city officials and members of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce during a business caravan Monday.

The caravan, the seventh conducted by the chamber, allows chamber and city leaders to visit with several business owners in each council district to find out what their concerns are and bring attention to services and programs offered by the city and the chamber.

"We're here to see what we can do to help," said Randy Gordon, Chamber president and CEO. "We know this is a tough economy."

In City Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga's 7 th District, most businesses there are small, home-based or family-owned and comprise two to four employees.

Many of them can't take time or may not be aware of events put on by the chamber or a nearby business association.

"They're just so busy just trying to keep the doors open," she said. "It's tough."

Christopher Ybarra, sales manager for Friedmans Appliance Center at 1827 E. Spring St., said that while sales dipped from last year, they are well up from previous years.

"Based on how the economy is going, we're doing well," he said.

Customer demands have shifted, Ybarra said.

"Last year, we saw a lot of brand-new homes and big giant projects like \$40,000 kitchens," he said. "This year, we're seeing a lot less of that. We're seeing a lot more smaller remodels, customers just staying in their homes or just upgrading their homes. A lot more in replacement business, necessities."

Luis Maimoni, creative director of Fresh! Graphic Design, said people are reluctant to spend on marketing and advertising.

"It's hard to get, right now, brand-new clients but we have a lot of existing clients that have been good," he said. "They recognize that they need to spend in this market. They know that by spending now they're creating opportunities that are going to pay off down the road."

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