

By SHANTEÉ WOODARDS
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A family of five spent the snow day roaming downtown Annapolis and then stumbled up to Amsterdam Falafelshop.



They ordered sandwiches, fries and soup, while admitting to owner Amrish Vyas that they came in largely because the eatery within Market House was one of the few things they found open.

Overall, Vyas said, the winter has been slow for the restaurant, and Thursday - with many streets still covered with snow - wasn't busy either.

But he hopes to capitalize on the cold and snow by attracting new people to Amsterdam Falafelshop - and making them repeat customers.

"You can see the excitement on somebody's face on a snow day where nobody else is open but you," Vyas said. "Foot traffic is what we depend on. We know that the cold weather we've had this winter has slowed profit down.

"However, we have seen people who otherwise would not venture out because it's cold and they're snowed in, but their families wanted to hang out. ... It's a mixed bag."

Vyas isn't the only one who thinks so. This winter - particularly Thursday's 12 inches of snow - has been a mixed bag for many Anne Arundel County businesses. Hotels have been busy, largely because of workers booking rooms close to their jobs. So have auto body shops, because slippery roads cause accidents.

Ordinarily, a forecast of snow means all hands on deck at ACT Technologies. This winter business has doubled at all six locations of the auto body shop.

ACT's Carroll County location has been the busiest, but the others, including Annapolis and Glen Burnie, have not been far behind, Kim Parson said.

The challenge has been repairing bumper and suspension problems quickly to make room for more cars.

“We’re working longer, harder and later in order to get through,” said Parson, who is a manager at the Glen Burnie shop and owns the others.

“It’s an ebb and flow when you have body shops. You can only take in what you can fit. ... You want to prioritize the new by moving the completed work out the door.”

Country Inn & Suites on Housley Road benefits by being close to shopping centers with retailers like Safeway, Best Buy and Home Depot, said owner Mark Patel.

When snow is in the forecast, Patel said, managers open early the next day, and so they usually book rooms at the hotel.

“All of that additional business goes out and the hotel fills up right away. If they have no power, they move into a hotel,” he said.

“We had a good January, but February was a little quiet for us. ... (Thursday) was one of those exception. Those weather days especially add business.”

Repairman Steve Lebow had to spend Thursday indoors, and it wasn’t as enjoyable as it had been when he worked for someone else. As the owner of Annapolis-based Appliance Guys - which offers mobile repair services - he sees the day off mainly as something that cuts his profits.

But it couldn’t be helped - he couldn’t risk getting his technicians stuck on snowy streets. When he heard about snow in the forecast, he canceled the appointments for the day.

“When we get snow days, we don’t work and we lose money. That’s tough,” said Lebow, who was able to spend the afternoon by the fire with his family.

“Getting down the road in these trucks can be difficult. All of that affects the service business. ... It’s just an annoyance.”

At Crownsville’s Bean Rush Cafe, Mark Abrahams opened but business was slow. Abrahams said it is a misconception that coffee shops like his do booming business on snowy days. That hasn’t been true, he said, since Bean Rush tends to sell colder drinks like smoothies and frappes during regular school hours.

“Winter weather definitely affects business in terms of when it’s very hot people don’t want to get out of the car. And when it’s very cold, people don’t want to get out of the car,” said Abrahams, who owns the shop with his wife, Shannon.

“We definitely see a drop in sales when the snow hits. It’s unfortunate, but that’s the way it is.”

http://www.capitalgazette.com/news/annapolis/this-winter-s-cold-temps-snow-create-highs-and-lows/article_73936f96-6427-5e2b-bca9-6562c2a17266.html