

**Businesses making the best of 'Big Dig' - - Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) - May 9, 2000**

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With graduation over and the city of Bloomington settling down to its summer proportions, heavy construction on Kirkwood Avenue is set to begin.

John Fox, project manager of Weddle Brothers Construction Co., said Kirkwood will be closed to all vehicular traffic from Indiana Avenue to Grant Street later this week.

The original target date for closing the road had been Monday, but utility relocation delays set that schedule back, Fox said.

The \$2.8 million construction project will replace a 100-year-old storm sewer under the intersection of Kirkwood and Dunn Street.

Workers will open a 30-foot-wide trench in the road — one section at a time — as they replace the storm sewer tunnel from the Kirkwood and Dunn intersection up Dunn to Sixth Street.

Other utilities will also be relocated and realigned during the course of the project, including major work on Dunn and Sixth streets.

Fox said the work — including an extension of the Kirkwood streetscape and renovation of Peoples Park — will be essentially complete by late October.

Part of the first phase of the work has been replacing a section of the storm sewer tunnel that runs under the Linnemeier building on the south side of Kirkwood.

Fox said that phase of the work was more difficult than expected, in part because the building's foundation was resting directly on the old storm sewer tunnel.

"They didn't expect any disruption to the degree that they've had," Fox said.

The project has been a disruption and cause of concern for area merchants for several months.

Under the terms of Weddle Brothers' contract, pedestrian access must be maintained to all area businesses at all times. But business owners have said the summer will be very difficult.

Out of that challenge, however, some area business owners say an opportunity has emerged.

"I think the best thing that is going to come out of this is that many of us have decided to work together," said Linda Prall, owner of Kilroy's restaurant and bar. "Now that we've discovered each other, we've decided we're going to keep it going."

Prall said the businesses in the area have never really worked closely together.

"We're all self-employed for a reason," she said.

But, she said, many business owners met during bi-weekly informational meetings on the construction project and started talking about ways to work together.

Several area merchants have worked with each other, their suppliers, the city storm water utility and Weddle Brothers to promote the summer construction as "The **Big Dig**," and devise a marketing and promotional campaign to keep customers coming downtown.

"I think it's really important for our community now to support our downtown businesses," said Talisha Coppock, director of the commission for downtown Bloomington. "Whenever they think of shopping or dining, it's important to think of downtown first, because we all really value our downtown community."

Even as the businesses hunker down for the summer, there are signs of health in the shadow of the construction equipment.

Smoothie King, a national chain selling all-natural, mixed frozen fruit drinks, is preparing to open a store next door to Blast Off Balloons May 30.

Pygmalion's Art Supplies Inc. has expanded into a neighboring space on Grant Street.

"Downtown is the place I want to be a retailer," said owner Jane Otten. "I don't want to be anywhere else."

Otten said she hasn't noticed much drop off in business as a result of construction.

"A lot of our customers complain about the construction, of course, because that is the way humans are," she said.

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