

Trendy street remains a shopping hot spot

by John Gregory

4 years ago | 3227 views | 2 | 10 | |

Called the “Melrose of San Diego” in the '90s, Garnet Avenue still attracts a large amount of foot traffic in spite of a static economy. The commercial district continues to evolve, and as it does, a handful of new entrepreneurs cast an eye toward the future. (First in a two-part series)

Gavin Naumoff, 21, is an entrepreneur whose new business, Pacific Beach Delivery, affords him a unique perspective on the area. While he does not have a storefront, he has Garnet Avenue directly in his sights. He delivers food from restaurants that call Garnet home, and makes deliveries to many of the businesses along the avenue.

Open since July, Pacific Beach Delivery is offering free delivery as a promotion until Oct. 15, at which time the service will cost \$4 plus the price of the meal. Naumoff said he has been delivering to real estate offices, guitar shops and hair salons, for example.

“They can’t leave, they’re cutting hair, they’re working on paperwork,” he said. “It’s something really convenient for them, just making a phone call as opposed to leaving the office.”

No stranger to Garnet, Naumoff was once a partner in Pacific Beach Cruisers, 1400 Garnet Ave., with Scott Crampton. Today, Naumoff is making the rounds of Garnet Avenue restaurants to promote his service, and he said he gained some insight about doing business there.

“I approached people with more of a business attitude and people were kind of turned off by that,” he said. “They look at you as a solicitor. What I noticed is being more laid-back and personable with people is a much better way of doing business with people on Garnet.”

The area has a tempo all its own and that tempo attracts young shoppers with cash to spend.

“It’s kind of like an experience to come down to PB, and then there’s the second life of PB nightlife,” said Jeff Kinney, owner of Surf Club Surf Shop, 952 Garnet Ave.

Garnet Avenue is right in the middle of the Pacific Beach Business

Improvement District, administered by Discover Pacific Beach, and the district's executive director Andy Hanshaw has a street level view of Garnet's vibe from his office at 1503 Garnet Ave.

"The beach community draws people from all over San Diego but also all over the country and internationally," he said. "They enjoy the vibe, the atmosphere, the laid back beach community feel and the mix of businesses that are down here – the salons and boutiques as well as the bars and restaurants."

Hanshaw acknowledged that there are a number of storefront vacancies on Garnet Avenue, which he estimated at between eight to 10, and he attributed the longer lasting vacancies to the difficult economy.

But he was also able to point out a number of new businesses on Garnet that have opened in the past year.

According to figures provided by CoStar Group, a commercial real estate information company, 28 spaces are available on Garnet and 12 new signed leases have been recorded in 2009. CoStar reports that 4 percent of the space in Garnet Avenue's 177 commercial buildings is vacant and 96 percent of the commercial space is leased, an upswing over the third quarter of 2008.

Todd Brown, owner of Bub's Dive Bar, 1030 Garnet Ave., said he sees some positive indicators along the street in spite of the slow economy.

"I think you're seeing businesses like Sherwin Williams, which is a Fortune 500-style company, come in and invest in the Garnet Avenue district and I think that's encouraging."

He has also observed a constructive trend: owners remodeling their buildings, which is what he said he did to his building, which was built in 1952.

"I don't think I've seen, ever, as much involvement with people putting money back into their businesses and working on storefronts," Brown said. "Even with an economy like this I think you are seeing a breed of business owners that are interested in making their businesses more valuable and willing to put an investment into a building."

One example was nearby, Brown said.

“Right next door to us is a new clothing-surf shop style place,” he said. “They’ve come in with some energy and I think they have a very unique business.”

That business is Long Hard Ride, which moved from 1815 Garnet Ave. to 1036 Garnet Ave. in the space formerly occupied by Atomic Clothing. The store, owned by LHR International, moved to the location two months ago and does business while a store remodel nears completion.

The shop sells clothing for men and women, including shoes, as well as snow boards, surfboards, skateboards, just about any type of athletic board there is, said Marshall Hodges, store manager.

“For anybody who likes to surf, skate, snow or moto, we have everything that they need,” Hodges said.

A look at the brands indicates the store is accurately targeting the action sports-minded young adult who frequents Garnet Avenue.

While Hodges notes that the harsh economy is hitting everywhere, he likes the feel of Garnet Avenue.

“It’s a very high energy area, very fun to be around,” he said.

Fit Factory, a personal training studio tucked into a space at 1451 Garnet Ave., was opened by Kent Davies and Matthew Taylor in May. They chose Garnet Avenue over another location in Pacific Beach because Garnet had exactly what they were looking for: “Young professionals, families, everything. Pretty much our whole demographic,” Davies said.

“The foot traffic is amazing here,” he added. “We see thousands of people walk by here every day.”

One new shop that other business owners pointed out as a place where business is booming is Which Wich Superior Sandwiches, 1001 Garnet Ave. on the corner of Cass Street and Garnet. Dennis and Maggie Holland opened the Pacific Beach shop in early April. The couple own two other shops, one in Hillcrest and one in Carlsbad. The chain has about 95 locations nationwide and has been successful near college campuses, Dennis said.

The Which Wich formula seems custom made for Garnet Avenue.

For one thing, indie music peals from the speakers and the special mix is changed each month.

“It appeals to a younger crowd,” Dennis said. “That age group really digs it.”

He describes the store’s interior as having a very clean, modern look.

In 5 minutes a customer can be in and out with their food.

“It comes in the bag (wrapped in foil), so you can take it to the beach,” Dennis said.