

Centrum parking garage changes parking patterns

By Patti Gallagher

Convenience and cost seem to be the two appealing factors of the Lincoln downtown Centrum parking garage, according to its users, manager and competition.

Centrum, the largest parking complex in Lincoln, is the least expensive and is city-owned.

The Centrum parking garage, which opened November 15, 1978, has a 1,039 space capacity, according to Tom Butcher, manager of the garage. It operates 24 hours a day, with supervision from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

289 of the spaces are rented monthly, at \$25 for a covered space, \$20 for a roof space. Most lots in Lincoln charge comparable rates, although one privately owned operation had a \$35 monthly fee.

The real savings of using the Centrum facility, according to individual lot owners throughout the city, is the hourly rate charged by the Centrum.

Centrum hourly parking is 25 cents, while lots around the city charge from 35 to 50 cents hourly. Butcher said that "the rate of hourly parking remains a point of friction" with other lots.

Butcher said that "we have had complaints on and off from other parking lot owners, especially about the early bird parking."

EARLY BIRD PARKING rates were in effect after the garage opened until the Centrum shopping complex opened about three weeks ago. On the plan, driver was charged only \$1, if entering before 9:30 a.m. and exiting after 6:00 p.m.

Butcher said the early bird policy is being studied for reinstatement.

According to Larry Isaacson, owner of Towne Parking, a 200-capacity lot on "M" St., the early bird parking at the Centrum had "a lot of affect" on his business. He said "It's tough to compete with the city."

Isaacson, whose lot was the only privately owned operation contacted by the Daily Nebraskan, said he has lost 20 percent of his business since the opening of the Centrum parking facility. Towne Parking has a monthly rate of \$35.

The remainder of lots contacted are members of Park and Shop, which is owned by 100 merchant participants. The Merchants pay a fee to be a Park and Shop member and, in turn, supply their customers with a stamped ticket to use any Park and Shop lot in downtown Lincoln.

A Brandeis parking lot attendant said,

however, that "our business has picked up." He said that because of the increased need for parking due to Lincoln Center renovation, "people are coming down more."

According to Butcher, in addition to the 289 monthly renters that use the Centrum garage daily, about 1,200 cars are run through each day, paying the hourly rate.

Butcher added that about 400 to 500 spaces sit open each day, excluding the overflow in the garage on football Saturdays, when lot capacity has peaked at 750.

Butcher said that the Centrum parking garage had a construction budget of \$4.6 million, set by the city. He said that the complete project cost about \$4.2 million.

BUTCHER SAID daily revenue would have to be about \$1,000 to meet all expenses, including the payment of 20-year bonds.

"Some days we make it, some days we are over, and some days under," he said.

Butcher also said that the first year of operation did not meet expenses but, "we are now meeting first year projections." He said that Centrum shopping complex's opening has increased the parking business and he expects to see a steady increase in usage of the parking.

Butcher said that eventually the Centrum is going to phase out monthly parking. He said the "city's goal was to provide low cost hourly parking," and that monthly parking will be eliminated in four to eight years.

The Centrum parking garage has about 100 people on a waiting list for monthly parking, Butcher said. It will be next spring before those requests can be filled, he added.

Drivers using the Centrum parking on Monday were informally polled and seemed to agree that price and convenience were the attractions of the facility.

Lincoln businessman, Jim Shonka, said that before the Centrum was built, he used to try to park in the street, and he "cussed and swore a lot." Shonka said he had many clients in the Centrum and surrounding areas and found the garage "cheap, useful, and very convenient." He said he thinks people are tired of going out to Gateway Shopping Center, 61st and "O" streets, and therefore, the Centrum is successful.

Linda Morrissy, an east Lincoln resident, said she generally goes to Gateway, but thinks the Centrum is "fantastic." She said the enclosed parking and shopping area will be the biggest asset during the winter months.

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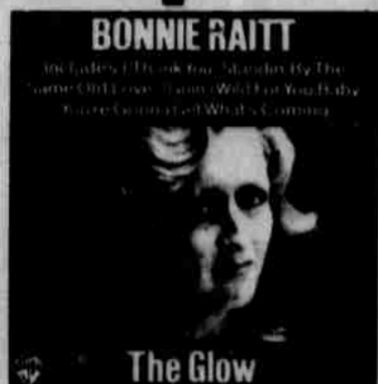


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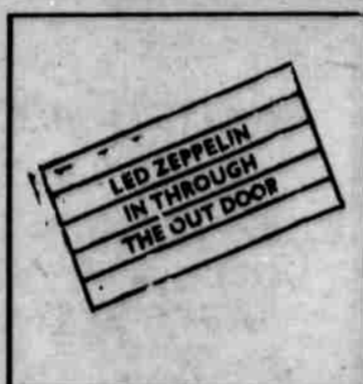
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