

# **New Brunswick downtown lays card on the table**

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New Brunswick has a new tool that city officials hope will attract shoppers, diners and theatergoers to its downtown business district.

It's a little bit of plastic that offers discounts at venues such as the State Theater, Amber Lion Antiques and Nova Terra.

City Market, the nonprofit agency that promotes the Hub City's downtown, launched the card in late June.

The idea for the card evolved from entertainment coupon books that are printed in many areas. City Market used to do one for the holidays, and Rutgers University does one for athletics fans, said City Market District Manager Colleen Flaherty.

The card was originally supposed to be launched during the holiday shopping season last year, but equipment problems caused a six-month delay.

Flaherty said the company providing the terminals to process the cards was sold, which created compatibility problems with terminals in some businesses. It took time to get new terminals and train business owners in their use, she said.

But the delay means the cards are being launched when businesses need it most -- in the slow summer months.

The agency sent a mailing to about 17,000 people in the greater New Brunswick region about 2 1/2 weeks ago. It is also planning a separate mailing, in English and Spanish, to New Brunswick residents. It received a \$25,000 state grant to promote the card.

Eleven hundred cards have been activated so far, said Flaherty.

"We're really excited with the response," she said.

Cardholders get the free card in exchange for basic information, such as names and addresses.

Eighteen businesses have signed up, most offering 10 percent discounts.

"Anything to bring in new business," said June D'Addario, who owns D'Addario & Co., a jewelry store on Albany Street at Kilmer Square, with her husband Donald.

No one has used the card in her store yet, but the store was closed in the week after the July Fourth holiday. And business has been slow in general, she added.

Ditto at the GNC on George Street, where owner Leslie Quadrel said business has been slow for some time.

"I'm trying to target the new people coming into the downtown area," she said.

But at Amber Lion Antiques, one shopper used the card last week, said owner Rob Marchisotto, who signed up for the program in hopes of attracting more customers.

At the upscale Nova Terra on George and Albany Streets, several diners have used the card, said manager Nicole Silva.

Flaherty expects that many businesses will eventually switch over to offer promotions that encourage repeat visits.

Some already have such promotions in place.

The State Theater is offering vouchers for discounts or free tickets on a point system. At the State Theater, each dollar

cardholders spend earns them a point. At 500 points, they'll get a voucher for a complimentary ticket.

"It's just such a good deal," said Joey Anderson, the theater's director of public relations, because theatergoers get a choice of venues.

The theater runs several promotions throughout the year, she said, but the card is part of a larger effort, she said.

Greg Ritter hasn't yet signed up for the card. The owner of George Street Camera said he offers plenty of other promotions on his own.

"It just seemed like it would be repetitious," he said. But if the card "catches on," he said he would consider signing up for it.

To get a card, visit [www.newbrunswick.com](http://www.newbrunswick.com).