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## Brewster businesses hurt by sewer project

By MARCELA ROJAS

THE JOURNAL NEWS

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BREWSTER — Construction efforts along Main Street have forced Boone Dog Coffee House owner Gretchen Brokaw to come up with creative solutions for her ailing business.

In the past month, Brokaw said she has beefed up evening activities at the normally popular day spot, hosting stand-up comedy routines, open mike nights and movie programming. She also is offering 10 percent discounts for senior citizens on Wednesdays, call-ahead curbside pickup and a new menu that includes wraps, salads and weekly lunch and dinner specials like chicken parmigiana and baked ziti. Without these new ventures, Brokaw said she's not sure the coffeehouse would survive.

"Business started dying out at the end of April," said Brokaw, who took over the Boone Dog about a year ago. "There is literally nobody here. I might get a couple of construction workers."

In recent weeks, the downtown has become a construction zone as hard hats tear up sections of the main thoroughfare for the village's multimillion-dollar sewer and water projects. The work, which occurs from about 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, has caused heavy traffic jams and has started to take its toll on merchants.

"We are doing lousy — going-out-of-business lousy," Thomas Sprague, the owner of Bob's Diner, said yesterday. "We're doing half the business we usually do during the week. All we can do is put out a big plea to people to come back to the village."

Village Engineer John Folchetti said 45 percent of the sewer work and 30 percent of the water project have been completed.

"The main work is essentially done, but they have to come back and make the connections," Folchetti said.

Laying and connecting the sewer lines is expected to be completed in the fall, with the water work to follow in the winter, he said.

The massive, \$38.2 million undertaking to build a new wastewater treatment plant and extend sewer lines throughout the village is being funded by New York City. The project will keep waste from flowing into the city's reservoirs. In addition to that effort, a \$6 million bond is being used to finance upgrades and replacements to village water pipes, wells and pumps, Folchetti said.

In March, Folchetti and the Coalition for a Better Brewster offered a presentation for business owners on how the work would progress along Main Street. Maps and weekly updates also have been made available to the merchants, Folchetti said. Recently, coalition member Richard Ruchala produced an infomercial featuring more than 20 commercial enterprises

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that will air this summer on Suscom cable television. The effort is meant to attract people to the downtown.

But proprietors aren't belittling the village's efforts to keep them apprised of the work effort.

"The planning process should be applauded," Brokaw said. "I knew this work was going to happen. The plan to improve Brewster was a big decision in why I bought the Boone Dog."

Still, that doesn't change the fact that commerce is suffering. Brokaw said she's losing between \$500 and \$1,000 a week in business. To help make up for some of that loss, she suggested that village officials support weekend street fairs.

"It's more than the money," she said. "I miss the people."

Mayor John Cesar yesterday said he would start an independent fundraiser to reimburse some affected merchants.

"I know they lost money, but what can you do?" Cesar said. "When I get done with this village, it's going to be beautiful."

While some may be avoiding the village during this time of noise, dust and traffic, others aren't so easily dismayed.

"It's short-term pain for long-term gain," village resident and property manager Mark Anderson said, following breakfast at Bob's Diner. "Any projects add hassle, but it's not going to stop me from patronizing the businesses I want to go to."

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