

Project work has an effect on businesses

St. Charles hosts meetings to hear, listen to concerns

By **ROALD HAASE**

rhaase@kcchronicle.com

ST. CHARLES – Some downtown merchants said Thursday that work on the First Street redevelopment project has affected their business, hindering customers from getting to their doors.

“Oh, it’s a huge problem,” said Sandy Ryan, owner of Bella Bridal at First and Indiana streets. “Not so much the [utility] shut-offs as the construction. The construction has just been overwhelming.”

Ryan said the problems began about two weeks before Christmas and included one incident in which it took her 45 minutes to get into her store. At times, stretches of First Street have been closed, and the public has thought her store was closed when it was not, Ryan said.

The work is part of the First Street project, which includes new buildings being built along First Street in a four-block stretch from Main Street south to Prairie Street. It is a public-private partnership, involving the city and private developers.

City Communications Specialist Susan Kempf said the city has hosted meetings the past two weeks at which construction concerns have been aired and information given to business owners. The second of the two meetings was conducted Thursday morning; more meetings will be on succeeding Thursdays.

See **PROJECT**, page 7C

Contractors completing Milestone Row on First Street

• PROJECT

Continued from page 8C

"We are taking very much to heart [merchant concerns] and doing everything we can to address the issues," Kempf said.

She said a major element of the project is installing new utility lines - including water mains, sewer lines and electric cables - which are being buried.

"We are going around and visiting different businesses on First Street and other businesses [on cross streets] that are being affected," Kempf said. "It's not always convenient for them to come to a meeting and not always convenient for them to call us."

The city also established a project hot line, Web site, and e-mail address for project information.

Currently, much of the work is being done in the block between Illinois and

Learn more about it

For information about status of the First Street redevelopment project:

- Call (630) 762-7097.
- Visit www.1stStreetSTC.org.

People also may send comments or direct questions to an e-mail address, 1stStreet@stcharlesil.gov.

Indiana streets, said Tannie Benson, owner of Illusions Hair & Nail Salon in Fox Island Square at 1 W. Illinois St.

"It's part of our hourly conversation," Benson said. "Every person who walks in here is having a hard time finding out what street they are supposed to come in on."

Water also has spurted at times from fire hydrants during the work, Benson said. Benson said it could be worse, however.

"Our clients, thankfully, are people who book their appointments before they leave," Benson said.

In addition to installing new utilities, contractors also are completing Milestone Row on the east side of First Street. It is a series of new multilevel buildings for stores and offices. Another component of the First Street redevelopment will be a new site for the Blue Goose Super Market.

David Richards, a city alderman and executive director of the Downtown St. Charles Partnership, a downtown promotional group, said it is important to let the public know that the stores and other businesses remain open. He said people might have been "kind of scared off by the signs."

The ongoing construction has affected her business, Ryan said.

"Even though we are getting traffic, the conversion rate [into sales] is way down," Ryan said.