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Kansas City Star, The (MO)

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Note to panhandlers on Plaza: Bah hamburger

HEARNE CHRISTOPHER JR.

To Scrooge or not to Scrooge, that's today's question ...

Spotted on the Plaza -- bright yellow signs on the window of McDonald's in Seville. Reads one: "Tips for Handling Pan Handlers. Do not give money to pan handlers. Remember -- do not be fooled. Food, shelter, clothing, medical assistance, job assistance are being provided for all those who are **homeless**."

Beneath are charities "donations can be made to," including the City Union Mission.

Homeless dude Billy Ray's take: "I seen it, I don't think nothing of it. I think the owner's a jerk. One time he came out and had one of his employees follow me around with a sign like that. The cops told him he can't do it. He was putting literature in people's sacks."

McDonald's manager Keisha Kirkland has a different take on the signs: "They've been up over a year. A lot of people have asked about them -- they say, they're very good. Instead of giving money, let (panhandlers) go to a shelter. A lot of people on the Plaza who aren't customers want to know where they can get the signs."

Kirkland says some panhandlers have moved on. "I think they got the hint," she says.

But is it a tad cold for a McDonald's with three plasma TVs and a cheerily festooned Christmas tree to effectively campaign against po folks?

"One of them complained that it was stopping him from making money," Kirkland says. "Like, How am I supposed to live if I can't make money by just shaking a cup? "

Cheeseburgers? Si. Lightsabers? No way!

Ten years ago KC 86 d an ordinance that read: "No person shall, directly or indirectly, by word, look, sign or deed, practice or aid in begging or mendicancy in or upon any street, sidewalk, park or public square or any other public place." The city repealed it after local beggar extraordinaire Jerry Mazer filed a lawsuit.

So what was novelty vendor Walt Willis doing trapped outside a barricade closing off the Plaza's interior on Thanksgiving? "The property is private, and they have the rights to the streets," Willis says. "We've been down here every year for six years, and we've been told we can't be on their property. We've been threatened several times."

Four years ago Plaza Security tried to ban Mazer from its art fair and lighting ceremony. The streets become private for those events, they said then. KC traffic engineer Steve Worley disagreed: "The permit allows for them to block the street so through traffic isn't driving down the road, but the sidewalks and street are still open to all pedestrians. It's still public property. Public property never becomes private property unless we vacate."

Plaza promotions manager Kara Breitenstein's take on fencing out trinket-meisters: "When we have a street permit, we can restrict the people who want to sell things on the street."

Wrong again, says Dennis Gagnon, public information officer for KC's Public Works Department. "Basically the city's position on what's permissible or not under the closure of a street is unchanged," Gagnon says.

What keeps vendors out of the Plaza, it turns out, is that it has -- unlike downtown, Westport, Waldo and Brookside -- an ordinance granting it "prohibited location" status, which means street vending is prohibited. Other prohibited locations include parks and boulevards, but only the Plaza and an area near the convention center are specifically mentioned.

Westport businessman Bill Nigro's take: "I guess the Plaza's got a lot of clout."

So many turkeys...

There has been precious little peace on earth where rival local country radio stations are concerned. First WDAF-FM dropped its 23-year-old Turkey Day tradition that collected turkeys and cash for the Salvation Army.

Then competitor KFKF-FM picked up the promotion and more or less dedicated it to iconic WDAF personality David Lawrence, who fathered the event. Tsk, tsk. Now WDAF's parent company is suing KFKF's parent company for using Lawrence's name, which by the way isn't even his real name. Turns out it's David Peterson.

How Turkey Day went: "It went very well," says KFKF morning host Dale Carter. "We collected about 500-some odd turkeys and \$16,000 in cash."

That's down from the glory days of David Peterson, er, Lawrence, but, "We only had a few weeks to promote it," Carter says. "So I think it will be a lot bigger next year."

Last call alert

After an 11-year run, Iliki Caf in the Picture Hills shopping center up north is bidding the Cowtown adieu. The highly regarded eatery will host a goodbye bash Sunday night. Game plan: Cook everything in sight and auction its vaunted wine collection. Pretty much everything's for sale except the staff.

Hit me at (816) 234-4441 or hearne@kcstar.com.

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