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## **Downtown Retail Holds Its Own in 2009 While Allen County Sales Tax Receipts Drop Almost 7%**

Fort Wayne, IN – Sales tax receipts from the Indiana Department of Revenue reveal downtown retail sales for 2009 have increased slightly from 2008 while sales in Allen County saw a decline of nearly 7% over the same time period.

Figures from the Indiana Department of Revenue showed that consolidated and non-consolidated sales tax receipts for 2009 in the 46802 zip code, including the downtown area, were up marginally over 2008 sales. Total sales tax revenue for the area in 2009 was \$11,482,280 compared to \$11,444,131 in 2008.

In comparison, sales tax revenue for all of Allen County in 2009 came in at \$152,764,925, down nearly 7% from the 2008 figure of \$163,855,285.

“Clearly, in a year when good economic news was hard to find, this was a positive result for downtown,” said Rich Davis, President of the Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District.

“Our downtown economy shows seasonal variations different from those countywide,” said Davis. “For example, while Allen County sales declined 12% in July, downtown sales were up 12%.” Davis attributed the mid-summer surge to a variety of factors, including growing TinCaps attendance, and daytime and evening events within the Downtown Improvement District.

Attendance totals provided by the TinCaps showed that ticket sales grew nearly 34% from April to July. Over the summer, license plate surveys conducted by the Convention & Visitors Bureau during the games indicated that 32% of vehicles were coming from outside Allen County.

“We were thrilled with our first year downtown at Parkview Field,” said Brian Schackow, Vice President of Sales and Finance for the TinCaps. “The fans really embraced the new downtown experience and that was reflected in the constant growth in attendance throughout the season with over 400,000 people coming to TinCaps games and another 100,000 for other events.” Of nineteen sell-out games, noted Mr. Schackow, fifteen were in the second half of the season. The new Parkview Field operations added 28 permanent and 300 seasonal and part-time jobs downtown.

Downtown business owners’ comments on 2009 business performance reflected the overall statistical trends.

“We were closed for renovation during the first part of the year, but the Gashouse and Takaoka saw significant increases in sales during the second half of 2009 compared to 2008,” said Ben Hall of Hall’s Restaurants.

"Downtown Fort Wayne was a great place for business in 2009," said Andrew Thomas, owner of Pint and Slice. In 2009, Pint and Slice saw a 43% increase in revenue over 2008. "2010 is already starting off with solid growth due to the improvements to Calhoun Street and the Downtown event schedule," said Thomas. "With the TinCaps season right around the corner we are preparing to be very busy all summer long."

JK O'Donnell's, a popular nighttime destination saw similar results. "Our sales were up 20% in 2009 and we had another really good January," said general manager Fritz Hoffman. "We are seeing a lot of activity downtown and it is exciting to watch."

Downtown restaurants were not the only businesses to see increases in 2009. By the end of the year, the Headwater's Park ice rink attendance figures surged 20% over 2008. In addition, the History Center's Festival of Gingerbread had seen over 10,000 guests in 2009, the highest attendance since 1998.

2009 was also a strong year for the downtown convention market. "Almost all of our numbers were up from the previous year. We had well over forty groups come downtown and a lot of them were much larger than in the past," said Gary Wasson, director of operations for the Grand Wayne Convention Center.

Dick Stoner, of Stoner's Funstores on Harrison Street, noted that the ups and downs of their unique business do not always reflect national economic trends. "During the recession of the 1950's, our business actually went up," he said. While 09 sales compared to 08 were relatively flat, on-line sales at [www.stoners.com](http://www.stoners.com) may have helped the bottom line.

In contrast, Cindy's Diner, where the motto is "Serving the Whole World—15 people at a time" provides a bellwether view of the Allen County economy as a whole. "We are down 7% from 08 to 09," said owner, John Scheele. "Mainly it's the average sale that's down—people are skipping their desserts." Yet Cindy's maintains a loyal customer base: "Seventy-five to eighty-five percent of the people who come here, I know by their first name," said Mr. Scheele. The Diner, though open on weekends, closes at 2 p.m., precluding the potential impact of evening ballpark and event visitors.

"Overall, downtown is well-positioned to re-establish its retail business base," said Davis. A recent DID survey based on vehicle counts and Citilink ridership estimated a downtown daytime population of over 20,000 in the 91-block downtown district. Census estimates provided by the Fort Wayne Redevelopment Commission indicate over 8,000 people living within the downtown district and the West Central and other adjacent neighborhoods. 2007 Geolytic estimates identify 15,500 people living within a one-mile radius of Wayne and Calhoun streets. "Nowhere else in Northeast Indiana do you find a concentration of both working and residential population that matches downtown Fort Wayne," said Davis.

For more information about the Downtown Improvement District, visit [www.downtownfortwayne.com](http://www.downtownfortwayne.com).

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