

## Taking on the economy as a team

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By: Ken Jubie



ALBANY, N. Y. -- The Hampton Inn and Suites in downtown Albany is lucky. The three year old hotel is within walking distance of a bunch of bars and restaurants and near several performance venues, like the Palace Theatre.

General Manager Michael Gulotty said location and a willingness to work with nearby businesses, has helped his hotel thrive while his counterparts in other parts of town are struggling.

"People ask me how we're doing this year compared to last year. Our revenues and our occupancy are actually up. But the demand is clearly down," Gulotty said.

Which means competition for customers is stiffer. So the hotel has become more aggressive in targeting broader clientele and making rates more competitive.

"We as a hospitality community are doing a much better job of managing. And I think the economic downturn may have forced us to do that," Gulotty said.

It's also forced several businesses to team up and package services. Last month, for example, The Hampton worked with the Victory Café and Palace Theatre to offer a room at the hotel, dinner for two and tickets to see Tom Jones. As expected, the deal was not unusual to be loved by anyone. It helped the hotel sell out, boosted the other businesses and made it a little easier for people to experience a night out on a budget.

"The better bang for their buck if you will, is kinda what they're looking for in this economic climate. Money will go a longer way when you've put some packages together that they can take advantage of," said Palace Theatre Director of Development Billy Piskutz.

"If as a group, everyone stays strong, downtown overall should thrive," said Victory Cafe General Manager Will Foro.

"You have three separate customer bases and so they market out to three different customer bases and all of a sudden you've just tripled your marketing," said Downtown Albany BID Executive Director Pamela Tobin.

The success of packaging services is also sparking the businesses to try other collaborative efforts.

The Palace, for example is selling ad space on its marquee in hopes of letting people know about other area businesses, because even in the face of a failing economy, the show must go on.