

FALL WINE WALK BRINGS CROWD DOWNTOWN

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Photo by Debra Jensen-De Hart Four friends from Illinois enjoy a girls' day out on Saturday at the Downtown Beloit Association's Fall Wine Walk. Toasting each other at the Turtle Creek Barnes & Noble Bookstore (from left): Marci Meyer, Rock City, Melissa Savage, Pecatonica, Rachel Dillow, Freeport and Lisa Mayer, Roscoe.

BELOIT - One way to get people to gather in a downtown is to offer them a fun event.

On Saturday afternoon, hundreds roamed Beloit's downtown as the Downtown Beloit Association (DBA) presented its second annual Fall Wine Walk.

"It's growing in popularity," said Shauna El-Amin, DBA Executive Director.

The wine walk is a big girls' day out event and also brings people in for bachelorette and birthday parties, she said.

Last year, the DBA sold 300 tickets for the walk. This year that 400 tickets were sold, she said. And, the tickets sold out a week early.

"This is one way to bring people downtown and it's great for the shops and restaurants," El Amin said.

Those who attended the event, bought \$25 tickets in advance which then allowed them to receive a commemorative wine glass for the day to use on the walk and to keep. Each person could receive 10, two-ounce samples from various venues. Participants were not allowed to carry wine outside of a venue.

The 16 sites serving wine included retail shops, restaurants and more.

At Rindfleisch Flowers, three sisters-in-law who said they all married brothers, sipped Ava Grace Rose, a semi-dry white wine. The three had eaten lunch in a downtown restaurant before beginning the walk.

"We ate lunch at truk't," said Robin Fiedler.

At the Turtle Creek Bookstore, four friends strolled through the store after receiving a couple ounces of Evans & Tate Bright Chardonnay.

"There's not a wine I don't like," said one of the four, Lisa Mayer of Roscoe.

While those strolling the streets appeared to be having a good time, shop owners also seemed pleased with the event.

"It's amazing," said Nikkie Chadwick, owner of Walnut Creek Apparel & Gifts.

"It's one of the best events for bringing in so many people at one time. Overall, I think it will be one of our best sales days - so was the one in the spring." she said.

The DBA also sponsors a spring wine walk.

Shatoria Teague, owner of Always & Forever Formal Wear, offered pheasant snack sticks and cheese along with Luccio Coconut Pineapple Moscato wine at her shop.

Those who sampled the fare also could browse among elegant dress-up gowns and apparel.

Megan Warntjes, owner of Chic & Unique Upscale Retail, said the wine walk brings in a lot of smaller sales.

"And you get a lot of new people coming in who didn't know we were here," Warntjes said.

The net income from the tickets will be used for downtown renovation and revitalization El-Amin said.