

## BizWatch: For downtowns, look to Knoxville

By KEITH ROYSDON · June 16, 2010

Even with Muncie's downtown in better shape than it's been in years -- more housing, more restaurants, more people -- there are still a few lessons to be learned.

Some of those lessons could come from the Tennessee city of Knoxville, which has a downtown that is busy enough to be considered lively but is not unmanageable to visitors.

Much of downtown Knoxville's focus is on the Market Square District, a couple of blocks of downtown set aside for a pedestrian mall and host to activities like a farmer's market and the city's recent International Biscuit Festival.

Pedestrian malls have been tried in plenty of places, including Muncie, where it didn't work. Former Muncie City Council member Bill Shroyer noted to me recently that he was one of those who called for an end to the traffic blockade of Walnut Street downtown a couple of decades ago.

But, somehow, Knoxville and Market Square make a pedestrian mall work. On any given evening, Knoxville residents and visitors stroll Market Square, slipping into and out of restaurants and bars and enjoying the public space between. The city's huge New Year's Eve celebration is held on Market Square each year.

Besides the biscuit festival, Market Square is the scene of this year's ongoing series of Sundown in the City all-ages concerts. Blues Traveler played a couple of weeks ago, and Drive-By Truckers is there this week.

Market Square has a long history -- its website says it was founded in 1853 -- and what appears to be a bright future. Every downtown needs a Market Square.

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Keith Roysdon

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Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

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