

# Merchants sail with balloon fest

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

**Y**OU MAY have heard that King Kong invaded downtown Farmington Friday.

Or that Farmington Place was trampled by a giant elephant.

All the stories are true. But merchants were still smiling when they opened for business Monday. Many are calling last weekend's Balloon Light Madness Festival a success, and say another will likely be planned for next year.

Despite winds that would not allow organizers to inflate hot air balloons and light up the nighttime sky, six huge cold air animal balloons were in place and made for an active fall weekend downtown.

"I have not seen so many people downtown on a Friday and Saturday in years," said Civic Theatre owner Greg Hohler.

Hohler is also on the board of the Downtown Farmington Business Association, which sponsored the Friday and Saturday event, and is also a member of the city's Downtown Development Authority board.

"It was windy, but we managed to keep the cold-weather balloons up," said Mike Cammarata, of Keego & Co. in Farmington, the company that owns the animal balloons.

Original plans called for having 10 hot air balloons, each seven stories high, inflated and lit up at night. In addition to the six character balloons. They managed to get only one balloon up in the sky late Saturday, but promoter Jay Masnick said the disappointment was overcome by a good weekend for the merchants.

"From a merchant's standpoint, it was a hands-down winner," said Masnick, who polled merchants this week for a reaction. "All in all, the merchants had a great weekend."



photos by SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Godzilla appears to be headed the wrong way in downtown Farmington, across from the Civic Theatre. The large balloons were part of a two-day merchant promotion.

Tethering a balloon is thirty times busier for Lindsey Swedzinski, 2, of Redford, who gets a boost from her mom, Stacey, Friday in downtown Farmington.



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