

Looking at businesses from a consumer view

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MONTROSE — Employees beware, your boss may have hired a “secret shopper” to see. The Montrose Area Merchant Association has introduced its own “secret shopper assessment program” allowing businesses an opportunity to assess their services to the community.

“Every business wants customer satisfaction. This offers a tool to assess those goals,” MAMA Executive Director Julianne Messenger said.

Through the new program, which kicks off at the end of May, businesses can learn how their store's appearance, facilities, product placement, pricing, checkout process and sales associates rate from a consumer's view.

A “secret shopper” enters the store and take notes on such things as how they are greeted, if the facility is clean, parking and customer service.

After their visit, they fill out an extensive report, rating different areas on a one-to-five scale and commenting on all parts of the experience.

In organizing the program, Messenger said MAMA did several “pilot” business assessments. Among those business that were evaluated were Camelot Gardens, Jeans Westerner and the Montrose Daily Press.

“It was an eye opener and an excellent tool,” Camelot owner Sheree Wanner said.

She said there were several areas that she found disturbing, but was glad they were brought to her attention.

She said she wished the program would have given her names of employees so she could correct the problem, but was overall satisfied.

“It is clearly something I'll do again and encourage other to do as well,” she said.

The Montrose Daily Press' secret shopper did include names of whom they talked with at the business and also had a sales representative evaluated via phone.

Messenger said the evaluation could be customized to fit the business.

Owner of Jeans Westerner, Mary Mathis, said she thought the program was “absolutely

excellent.”

“They come in and tell your weaknesses and strengths,” she said. “They focused on weaknesses, but it was constructive.”

Mathis said she was pleased with the program, even though she might not have been pleased with the results.

“It gives a good objective look at a business that when you working day in and day out at, you don’t see.”

Messenger said both MAMA members and non-members could sign up for the program. They choose from either a basic or deluxe package.

A basic package cost a member \$25 and is \$50 for non-members.

The deluxe package, Messenger said, is an expansion from the basic package and is more custom for the particular business. This package is \$50 for members and \$100 for non-members.

MAMA has hired seven secret shoppers with flexible schedules who are detailed orientated, observant and who are able to elaborate on their experience when visiting a business.

“We’ve got a really good crew,” Messenger said.

Messenger said businesses could get all the details on the program at MAMA’s next monthly Merchant Coffee on May 24 at both 8:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Businesses who were evaluated for the pilot program also received a program critique form, which they return to MAMA. Messenger said the feedback is used to evolve the program to fit the needs of Montrose businesses.

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