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## Elon businesses sizzle with students' return

By Bill Cresenzo

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Mediterranean Deli in downtown Elon opened in February, just three months before Elon University students made their mass exodus from town for summer break.

Ruby Brinkerhoff, the deli's manager, wasn't sure what to expect during the summer, as far as business was concerned. The restaurant in Park Place on Haggard Avenue had quickly become popular with the students, who converged there each day to feast on hummus, gyros and dozens of other mediterranean dishes, desserts and salads.

Now that the students are back and summer break is over, Brinkerhoff is pleasantly surprised.

"It was interesting," she said. "Over the summer, we had a really good connection with the locals. It was much busier than we thought it would be."

Brinkerhoff said that while the restaurant had made it a point to become a part of the university, it also made sure to welcome general Elon community and beyond. She said that many of her customers come from Burlington and other places.

Still, downtown Elon business owners always plan throughout the year for the summer sales slump, said Peter Ustach, owner of Pandora's Pies.

He said that the pizza business' sales fall by about half or more during the summer.

But it's not just because the Elon students have left for the summer.

"Alamance County as a whole is a lot slower," he said, with families on vacations and kids away at summer camp.

He said that the restaurant helps offset employee's lost hours through an agreement with Olde Forest Racquet Club, where employees work the concession stand during the summer.

"We are just the opposite of a beach schedule," he said. "They basically have three months to operate and make their money and we have eight or nine months."

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