

Subscribe Now | Pay Bill | Place an Ad | Contact Customer Service | Contact The Detroit News

RSS | Email Newsletters | PDA

Search [careerbuilder.com](#)  
 Archive: [Mon](#) | [Tue](#) | [Wed](#) | [Thu](#) | [Fri](#) | [Sat](#) | [Sun](#) | [Today](#)

Home | News | Local | **Sports** | Autos | Business | Entertainment | Lifestyle | Opinion | Classifieds | Jobs | Cars | Real Estate | For Rent | Shopping

**Lions-NFL**

Lions-NFL RSS Feed | Email Headlines | Text Alerts | On Your PDA

**JUMP TO SITE INDEX**

Print | Email | Comment | Read Comments | Text Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#) | Save and Share

Saturday, December 6, 2008

## Detroit deals with blackout factor

All those empty seats at Ford Field are hurting a variety of businesses around downtown.

Terry Foster / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- As the Lions continue to lose, Steve Mallie, owner of Mallie's Bar in Southgate, has hit upon a win-win proposition.

On Sundays, Lions fans are invited to make a donation to breast cancer research and then take swings at a jalopy in the bar's parking lot.

It's a win for medical research and for the fans who can vent their frustration over the woeful state of their 0-12 team.

Advertisement

### 2 Rules for Stomach Fat

Obey These 2 Easy Rules & Drop 4lbs Every 4 days...

[ErinsWeightLoss.com](#)

### Rachel Ray's Diet Works

Read how I lost 44 pounds without a diet. As seen on CNN...

[BeckysWeightLoss.com](#)

### The VIERA from Panasonic

Enter a New Visual Era w/ Panasonic VIERA HDTVs-An...

[Panasonic.com/VIERA](#)

Mallie's promotion might be humorous, but it's no laughing matter to businesses and workers who depend on the excitement and bustle of NFL Sundays for their livelihood.

**University of Detroit** Mercy professor Mike Bernacchi, who studies sports and entertainment marketing, estimates that Sunday downtown business sales are down 25-50 percent because of television blackouts and lower ticket sales. That's not peanuts, except for Edwin Woodson.

Woodson, who is otherwise unemployed, sells peanuts for \$1 a bag outside Ford Field.

"Man, some people think I am a drug addict," Woodson said. "I'm not. I am just trying to make it. It is hard out here. I don't have a job and this is what I do to feed my family."

When things were going well, Woodson said he made about \$500 in sales. This season he said he's averaging \$100-\$125.

The Lions had sold out every home game since Ford Field opened in 2002, until Oct. 26 against the Redskins.

Sunday's home game against the Vikings will be the fourth in the last five home games not to sell out -- and thereby blacked out on local TV.

### Fans losing interest

The Lions are averaging 56,038 fans this season, down from last year's average of 61,310. They hadn't drawn fewer than 60,000 to Ford Field until the final game of the 2007 season, when they announced attendance of 59,938 against the Chiefs. Now, five of the last seven games have drawn crowds below 60,000, including a Ford Field low of 49,096 on Nov. 23 against the Buccaneers.

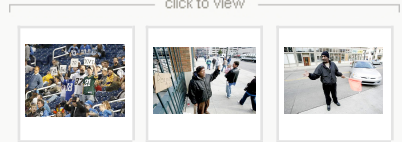
Lions representatives declined multiple requests for comment. It's simple, however, to extrapolate that they're losing money.

Ticket revenue gets split between the home and visiting teams in the NFL (60 percent for the home team), with a little more than one-third of the gate receipts shared equally among the league's 32 teams. But hosts get to keep all of the revenue generated from luxury suites and club seating, which is one area where the Lions' woes -- coupled with the staggering local economy -- hurt the bottom line.

Next week, for example, the Lions travel to Indianapolis to face the Colts at brand new Lucas Oil Stadium, where the annual revenue from club and luxury seating is estimated at \$25 million. Luxury suites at the Cowboys' palatial new stadium set to



Lions fans aren't selling out Ford Field anymore, but those who are going still are finding something to root for. (Daniel Mears/The Detroit News)



### Related Content

- Forum: Join the discussion in Lions Talk
- Lions blog: News and commentary

### More information

#### Black cloud

League rules require home teams to reach a sellout 72 hours prior to kickoff for games to be on local TV. Here's the NFL's last seven years:

#### Year Sellout Blackout Pct.

Year	Sellout	Blackout Pct.
2008#	188	4
2007	246	10
2006	249	7
2005*	244	12
2004	226	30
2003	230	26
2002	230	26

# Not including this Sunday's games; \* includes waiver for Saints games after Hurricane Katrina

#### More online

- Explore an interactive feature on Sunday's matchup.
- Read the Lions Blog.
- Join the discussion in Lions Talk.
- Go to [detnews.com/lions](http://detnews.com/lions).

### Related Articles

open next season will be sold for up to \$500,000 a year.

"That's where you make your money," said one NFC front-office executive, who asked to remain anonymous. "So when you see those empty seats on the club level there (at Ford Field), that's not a good sign, obviously. But that is not just a problem in Detroit now. We're all facing challenges in this economy going forward."

That's an acknowledgement NFL commissioner Roger Goodell makes as well, telling the Associated Press last week, "There's no secret on sponsorship, advertising, licensing -- those numbers are going to be impacted by the current climate. We're aware of that."

Asked if individual teams already are struggling, Goodell said: "Sure. Absolutely. For (a variety of) factors: What's happening to sponsorship. What's happening to licensees. What's happening to our ticket holders, club seat holders, suite holders. This affects all of us."

The Lions share the NFL's healthy \$8 billion annual revenue, which is derived in part from its network television contracts. Roughly 80 percent of national and local revenue is shared equally among the league's 32 teams.

## Sound of silence

Matt Sobczek of Waterford and Dean Ceifetz of Milford were breaking up pieces of wood and feeding it into a blazing fire in a downtown parking lot across from the Skillman Library.

It is tradition for the men to join their buddies, Jeff Frank of White Lake and Mike Withers of Milford, for early morning tailgates that include breakfast, lunch and, sometimes, dinner. But 2 ½ hours before kickoff, they were one of only four groups in a lot that normally would be half-full by then.

"The optimism is gone," Frank said. "Sometimes this lot doesn't even fill up. You can blame the economy, I suppose. But the product on the field is so bad. People are so upset when they leave here."

Some parking lot attendants said they are getting 10-40 percent less cars in their lots. One, whose lot is just three blocks from Ford Field, said his first customer arrived at 11:37 a.m.

"This is terrible, terrible," said Darel Lewis, of Detroit, who was working with brother Donell at one lot. "People are not coming out like they usually come out. The other teams' fans are coming out and they seem to be enjoying themselves."

As if on cue, a few minutes later the Lewis brothers parked their first car -- filled with Buccaneers fans.

"I should charge you double," joked Frank Ventimiglia, of Grosse Pointe Woods, after waving the car in.

Ventimiglia's lot can fit 60 cars. He said he is parking about 50-55 at a reduced price, which means his revenue is down about \$550 each Sunday.

"Fans are fed up," Ventimiglia said.

## Buyer's market

Need more proof? Ask [Kevin Williams](#) of Detroit.

Williams was outside Comerica Park early Thanksgiving morning, wearing a gray Grambling jacket and holding a bright sign that read, "I need tickets." What he really was doing was trying to sell tickets. He had four suite seats with parking passes, as well as general admission tickets.

"I will tell you, bro, it's a grind out here," Williams said.

A group of Titans fans passed. Williams waved the tickets and yelled: "Who needs an upgrade?"

The crowd brushed by without a glance.

Scalping is illegal in Detroit, but scalpers -- who go by nicknames of Shorty, Cougar, Black and Smoove -- are plentiful.

Two paused while working the pedestrians and talked wistfully about \$1,500 days at the Pontiac Silverdome. Now they said they are scrambling to make \$300-\$500.

One man bragged: "Man, I once sold \$800 in Pontiac and I didn't even leave the bus stop."

Williams offered his suite tickets to a man for \$100 each. The man looked them over, waved his hand and headed toward Ford Field.

"These are good tickets and I offered him \$100 each," Williams said.

"He wants to pay \$10. And the sad thing is he will get it somewhere else. He will get it."

Lions fans are not buying because the product has been terrible. The team has lost 19 of its last 20 games and has an eight-year record of 31-93.

## Foul mood

Bernacchi, the UDM professor, said fans don't spend as much before, during or after games when they are not happy.

Currently, thousands of Lions fans are entering and leaving Ford Field in a foul mood and spending less at bars, restaurants and concession stands.

Harry Kefalonitis, owner of Harry's Detroit Bar & Grill, said he used to open for breakfast around 8 a.m. and stayed busy until 10 p.m. on game days. Even in recent seasons when the team wasn't doing well, fans packed the stadium, and if the

- [Cops: Mom's teen danced at sex party](#)
- [Race on to finalize auto deal](#)
- [Cherilus' hit angers Allen](#)
- [Stopped short: Lions fall to 0-13 thanks to red-zone woes](#)
- [Is Wood too pricey for Tigers?](#)
- [Johnson is Lions' only hope](#)
- [Mich. economy stuck in 8-year recession](#)
- [Commentary: Lions can't blow it and win now](#)
- [Spartans eager to continue mission for respect](#)
- [School autopsy tours canceled](#)

(updated hourly. Rankings as of 3 pm)

game got out of hand they'd often walk to nearby spots like Coach's Corner, The Harbor House, Hockeytown Café and Harry's to watch the rest of the game on TV.

They are less likely to do that these days. Now, Kefalonitis said, fans begin to trickle in around 11:30 a.m. and they head out by 5:30 p.m.

"It used to be that people would come down and be excited about coming down for the whole NFL experience," Kefalonitis said. "Now they are like zombies going through the motions. They are going because they already have tickets and they have to go."

Lions fan Erin Cady of Birmingham ducked into The Old Shillelagh in Greektown, with friends Kelly Dogani of Dearborn and Kristin Bazick of Westland, following a recent game.

They said they noticed people were leaving quicker to get home.

"Fans are frustrated," Cady said. "They want the Lions to do well but they are not competitive and I just think people get frustrated and angry."

Said Dogani: "I feel bad for fans. This is all a lot of them have to look forward to and their football team is really bad."

"You know, I do love them. It is your hometown team. You have pride in Detroit. But it is not good right now."

John Niyo contributed to this report. You can reach Terry Foster at (313) 222-1494 or [terry.foster@detnews.com](mailto:terry.foster@detnews.com).

Article Tools: [Print](#) [Email](#) [Comment](#)

**In the Blogs...**

**Daniel Howes' Blog**



**Daniel Howes:** The CEOs of Detroit's automakers endured hours of testimony yesterday before the Senate Banking Committee, parried proposals for a GM-Chrysler merger and hypothetically ... [Continued](#)

**Raging Bullard**

**George Bullard:** On "Meet the Press" today, Barack Obama took a tough line against auto companies. He wants to keep auto makers "feet to the fire." Of course, Congress ladled out loot to ... [Continued](#)



**Going Home**



**Michael Happy:** Detroit's Big Three CEOs should have ridden camels to Washington. Gunther the camel tries to eat the Christmas star at the park. And once they got to our nation's ... [Continued](#)

[More blogs](#)

**MORE IN: LIONS-NFL**

- [Detroit deals with blackout factor](#) - 12/06/2008
- [Lions 2-minute drill](#) - 12/06/2008
- [Bills' visit miffs CFL](#) - 12/06/2008
- [Judge blocks 5 suspensions](#) - 12/06/2008
- [Lions are blacked out again](#) - 12/05/2008
- [Defense's focus is on trying to stop Peterson](#) - 12/05/2008
- [Chargers find cure to ails](#) - 12/05/2008
- [Giants' Pierce unaware of gun](#) - 12/05/2008
- [Rivers throws for 3 TDs as Chargers roll](#) - 12/04/2008
- [Report: Ex-Lion, MSU star Rogers in jail](#) - 12/04/2008
- [Lions-Vikings won't be on local TV](#) - 12/04/2008
- [Union sues to block suspensions of NFL players](#) - 12/04/2008



**Site Index**

<b>Essentials:</b> Home Page One PDF Sports PDF Weather Horoscope Lottery Crossword Sudoku Contact Us <b>Multimedia:</b> Photos/Video News Photos Autos Photos Audio Galleries Video Photo Store	<b>News:</b> Nation/World Politics/Govt. Elections Religion <b>Local/State:</b> Metro/State Wayne Oakland Macomb Livingston Commuting Schools Michigan History Charlie LeDuff Obituaries Death Notices	<b>Autos:</b> Autos Insider Drive Joyrides Auto Shows Auto Reviews Auto Photos Autos Talk Test Drive blog <b>Business:</b> Business News Personal Finance Stocks Technology	<b>Sports:</b> Sports Lions/NFL Pistons/NBA Red Wings/NHL Tigers/MLB Shock/WNBA MSU U-M More Colleges High Schools Golf Motor Sports More Sports Ski Guide Scoreboards	<b>Entertainment:</b> Entertainment Music Calendar Movies Movie Finder TV Listings TV/Radio Restaurants Wine Report Celebs Performing Arts Casinos Puzzles/Games	<b>Forums:</b> Forums Index Lions Talk Wings Talk Pistons Talk Tigers Talk Ask Mike O'Hara News Talk Autos Talk Faith Talk <b>Opinions:</b> Editorials Letter to Editor Blogs Columnists Cybersurveys	<b>Lifestyle:</b> Lifestyle Homestyle Food Recipe Finder Health/Fitness Fashion/Shopping Families/Parenting Travel/Recreation MichMoms MichDads <b>Other</b> Special Reports
--	--	--	---	---	--	--

**Special Reports**



**Special section: Auto industry in crisis**

Several years of cost cutting, buyouts, plant closings and downsizing haven't been enough to turn the tide for General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. - Nov. 13, 2008

- [Special Report: Restoring the glory](#) - Feb. 8, 2007
- [Detroit in transition](#) - Sep. 11, 2008
- [Special Report: General Motors, 100 years old and counting](#) - Jul. 14, 2008
- [The Synagro deal: FBI investigates Detroit City Council](#) -

**Do you know your Credit Score?** FREE score.com

<b>Excellent</b>	750 - 840	<b>Fair</b>	620 - 659	<b>I Don't Know</b>	????
<b>Good</b>	660 - 749	<b>Poor</b>	340 - 619	<b>Find out INSTANTLY!</b>	

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.

[Terms of Service](#) | [Contact](#) | [Help](#)

Jul. 8, 2008

[More Special Reports](#)