

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)



REGULARS GET GRINCHED | At the Union Square Market, regular vendors shiver at the scent of eggnog as Christmas vendors push them out of the prime locations.

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## Cast out by Christmas lights

**By: Andrew Butler**

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By 10 a.m. on most days in Union Square Park, Candice Sena, a boisterous woman of 37, has set up her table of buttons. They feature pictures of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, or they're emblazoned with phrases like "I support the troops but not the president." But this morning her stand has been relegated to the outskirts of the park, far from what she considers a prime location by the Union Square Holiday Market.

Now in its 12th year, the festive labyrinth of retailers has become a familiar event and a shopping destination for New Yorkers and tourists alike when it sets up shop from Nov. 23 to Dec. 24. But the street vendors who work in that space the rest of the year - some as their only means of making a living - say that they are displaced and in some cases commercially overpowered by the market.

"The Holiday Market takes over the space and kicks out the vendors," said Sean Basinski, director of the Street Vendor Project, a program that works to support the rights of New York City street vendors. The organization has not, however, formally studied the effects of the Holiday Market on year-round vendors.

Sena wakes up every day at 5:45 a.m., drops off her 3-year-old daughter at day care by 8:30 and drives into Manhattan from Queens in her '92 Toyota Camry. The car is packed with scarves, hats and the political buttons she's been selling for 15 years to make ends meet.

Another vendor, Bill Williams, sells customized wooden name plaques adorned with prints of cartoon characters. He says many vendors resent the Union Square Holiday Market for taking up spots where they normally sell. But Williams thinks the market is a good thing because it

serves shoppers and businesses.

"It's all about the money. They have the money to buy those spots," he said, standing by his table at the very edge of the park. "So I can't complain."

The National Retail Federation estimates that holiday spending will increase 4 percent this year to \$474.5 billion, and the retailers at the Union Square Holiday Market are prepared to claim their share. Urban Space Management, the organization operating the Holiday Markets in both Union Square and Columbus Circle, would not disclose the price of renting a retail space, but more than 100 businesses fill the market this year, with more just outside the gates.

Sena said her business is "absolutely" affected by the Holiday Market. On a good weekend she might make \$250 a day, but now she has stiff competition.

"I'm not even making 50 percent of what I normally make," she said.

The counterargument is that the Holiday Market attracts customers to the street vendors and the rent-paying retailers alike.

"It's obviously a popular event for people to set up around," said Liz Rees, executive director of the Union Square and Columbus Circle Holiday Markets for Urban Space Management. "I'd say they're doing pretty well for themselves."

"I think it benefits everybody," said Jose Delacruz, 36, a street vendor from Brooklyn selling T-shirts and prints of a painted cityscape. "It's a big variety of things available to people."

Customers must pass by a half-dozen or so street vendors on either side of the Holiday Market before entering. Once inside, they roam the tiny town of booths to survey the multicolored hats, fragrant candles and quirky gifts, like Dostoevsky hand puppets or librarian action figures.

"I think it's nice," said Judith Wockel, who was born in New York City 81 years ago last Wednesday. "It's low key and it stays at a pretty good standard."

The Union Square organizers expect that standard to continue bringing money into the area. Jennifer E. Falk, executive director of the Union Square Partnership - a nonprofit organization of business owners dedicated to revitalizing the area - encouraged the small crowd at the Holiday Market kickoff last Tuesday to spend their money there and in surrounding restaurants and stores.

She did not, however, mention the street vendors selling goods on the outskirts of the park, vendors that for the rest of the year organize the park's commerce on a first-come, first-served basis.

"You can set up anywhere in the park," said Sena, between political discussions with potential customers. Then, stopping and turning toward the Holiday Market she added, "Well, when

they're not here."

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