

EDITORIAL

Ball drop a needed pick-me-up for Destin's harbor

It was a bright ending to what many will remember as the darkest year in a generation.

You wouldn't have guessed we were in the midst of a recession by gauging the crowds and merriment at Destin's HarborWalk Village on New Year's Eve night.

Though polls suggested that many would be spending the party holiday at home, residents and visitors from surrounding cities and states turned out to watch the Village's first ball drop and end the year with a bang — or two.

With the promise of a double dose of fireworks — one show at 8 p.m. and another at midnight — revelers parked at the Community Center and beyond. They dashed across Highway 98. Harborfront restaurants reported that customers had reserved their spot for weeks ahead of time.

And at the end of the night, more than 5,000 people transformed our working waterfront into a playground as they ushered in the new year to good music, food and a pyrotechnics show unmatched this side of Disney World.

It was a night to remember.

More than that though, this kind of boost is critical when you recognize that Destin's fishing fleet — and to some extent its tourism industry — are treading water. In a sea of beach homes, condos, shopping centers, restaurants and planned communities, the docks are what set us apart.

Perhaps this is an omen that 2009 will be the year of the harbor. Maybe, just maybe, in the spirit of Auld Lang Syne, city leaders and property owners will find consensus on harbor redevelopment and a boardwalk that isn't broken up by barricades.

Now that would be a rising tide that could float all boats.