By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

The weather was perfect, the downtown Christmas lights were on and businesses were flooded with shoppers last Thursday at the Imperial Chamber of Commerce Christmas Festival.

About 30 individual businesses offered their own in-store drawings, in addition to the Chamber's punch card drawings for $500 in Chamber Bucks and another $200 to winners who turned in the green flyer that showed they visited 10 businesses.

A special unannounced surprise greeted people attending the soup and pie supper at the St. Patrick Parish Hall that evening.

Silver Bell and Tinsel, a mother/daughter reindeer pair from Wray, Colo., wearing jingle bells, were on the scene in a lighted pen north of the hall.

Chamber President Jana Pribbeno said they decided to bring in the reindeer as a special added attraction.

"We wanted to provide a special attraction that night for young and old alike," she said.

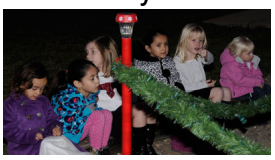
And they were. People were outside the penned area throughout the evening, many saying they'd never seen reindeer before.

Kyle Hendrix of Wray, Colo., operates Velvet Antler Velvet Noses Reindeer Co., with his wife, Holly.

The two brought to Imperial are part of a herd of five the Hendrixes own. They started their reindeer business two years ago.

It's been a lifelong dream of his to own reindeer, Hendrix said.

"I've always been interested in them," he said.



About 20 years ago, when he was eight or nine, he saw an article in a Farm Bureau newspaper about reindeer owned by a Denver woman. He's kept in touch with her since then, and purchased their first couple of reindeer from her.

A bull and heifer were added to the herd this August, purchased in Canada, he said, and he hopes to continue to grow the numbers.

One challenge of raising reindeer is the weather, he noted, because they can't be outdoors if the temperature hits 70 degrees or more.

That means housing them inside a barn with fans, he said.

In addition to grass hay, they are fed a special reindeer feed consisting of barley, oats and cracked corn. They are also on a regimen of shredded sugar beet pulp and a high protein antler max deer pellet that aids in antler growth.

Hendrix's reindeer business is just part-time.

While he was previously involved in a dairy operation, Hendrix said he is now in business with

his father. They run a 600-head beef herd and operate a 3,000-head feedlot between Wray and Holyoke, Colo.

It's easy to tell, however, he loves the reindeer business.

He said young and old alike are drawn to them, and many of the older people mention to him they've never seen a reindeer.

"Some never thought they even existed, but they do," he said.

They have traveled as far as 200 miles with their reindeer for special holiday events and winter parades.

Second punch card drawing is Dec. 21

The first group of three winners in the Chamber's Shop at Home punch card drawing was announced at last Thursday's Christmas Festival during the soup and pie supper.

Winners were Phil Harris, $250 in Chamber Bucks; Deb Bartlett, $150; and Jan Schultz, $100.

Shoppers at more than 30 Imperial businesses participating in the promotion can have their cards punched when making up to $100 in purchases at one location. Once $200 in punches are secured, the card can be entered in the drawing.

One more punch card drawing will be held Friday, Dec. 21, when another $250, $150 and $100 in Chamber Bucks will be awarded.

All cards not drawn last week will stay in the bin for the Dec. 21 drawing, according to Chamber members.

Winners who submitted the stamped green flyers were Jeri Johnson and Alan Carman, $50 each; Marlea Thompson. $45; Susan Jaeger, $30; and Sue Knobbe, $25, all in Chamber Bucks.

The full list of winners from all of the drawings held last week can be found in the Chamber ad on page 11.

An estimated 250 were served a variety of soup, prepared by the St. Pat's Altar Society that evening. Pies were contributed by Chamber members. Funds raised in free will donations and from the sale of noodles and cookbooks will be used by the church toward purchase of a new sound system for the hall.