

BBIA releases plans for 2015 at AGM/breakfast



By Nate Smelle

The York River Room at the Bancroft Eatery and Brew Pub came to life early on the morning of Thursday, Jan. 22 for the Bancroft Business Improvement Area's (BBIA) annual general meeting. A good opportunity for local business owners to build their social networks while enjoying a buffet-style breakfast, this popular gathering brings together BBIA members to reflect upon the successes and challenges they faced during the previous year. It also provides members the opportunity to get their bearings for the year ahead.

Once the cutlery and finished clinking and everyone's bellies were full chair of the BBIA, Peter Whitehead welcomed the crowd, and then got down to business. The BBIA represents 225 businesses throughout Bancroft and the surrounding area. One of its main mandates is to help make improvements on municipal properties through beautification efforts.

"Beautification is really, really important, and I know you've heard this before but it's not just about beautification," said Whitehead.

"It's that first opportunity for first impressions, and first impressions count. Businesses large and small across the world spend billions of dollars a year making sure their product or their service looks good. The same principle applies to an individual business, and the same principle applies to attend."

Highlighting how crucial first impressions can be in attracting new business and ratepayers to the area, Whitehead gave examples of some of the beautification projects to expect in 2015. Some of these initiatives will build upon beautification efforts already underway like enhanced flower displays, the greening of the farmers market and seasonal decor. Adding to the Bancroft's new look there will also be a series of historically-themed banners hung throughout downtown for a public art trail would also be on the agenda.

"This approach was absolutely 100 per cent unique," Whitehead said.

"I have never seen a municipality do this before. We all know that infrastructure needs to be upgraded and it creates a great deal of inconvenience at times, and the municipality went out of its way to try and make what could have been a really painful situation less painful. These are the type of things that we don't recognize behind the scenes sometimes with the role that the municipality actually plays."

Barb Shaw, who was tasked with bringing energy back to the downtown core through organizing four public events during the bridge street closure of 2014 spoke next. These events included: Pet-fest; the May 24 Icebreaker Street Party; the Tailgate Yard Sale and Chalk Fest. Sharing her insight on some of the successes and challenges that she observed while making use of this temporarily

available community space, she said it was the partnerships that made the events a success.

?We did four major events and they were totally successful because of the partnerships that existed,? said Shaw.

?The big thing that I took away from running these four events is that you can promote the crap out of them but you almost need to stage them. It's the same notion that you always need to have that first person on the dance floor. I think as organizers you almost have to decide that person. You have to have people there making it look animated in order for other people to come.?

The BBIA's executive director Chris Drost provided members with more detailed account of what lies ahead in 2015. Looking forward, the BBIA plans to focus its attention on four main objectives in the next year. These include: beautification, marketing and promotion and destination development, and communication and governance.

?We have had a number of people approach us about a public art trail, so the role of the BBIA here might be to pull potential partners together and hopefully one of those partners will run with it. At our breakfast consultation back in the fall one of the key things that business owners said they would really like is a buy local strategy. What we hope to do this year is not just to focus on at Christmas buy local program but to develop a strategy that is all year long.?

In addition to this by local initiative the BBIA also has a destination development strategy. These plans include a number of new events coming to town, as well as a number of improvements to existing events.

There will be an Algonquin storytelling kiosk set up in Cenotaph Park in downtown Bancroft this summer where residents and visitors can learn about the history of this area's first people. The Knights of Columbus plan to add a new event to the mix with the soap box Derby planned for Station Hill. The Juno nominated kids group Splash n' Boots will also be coming to town to entertain local children and families. In another attempt to appeal to local youth there will also be a BMX stunt show how do the skate park in Riverside Park. The York River paddle challenge will also be returning to Bancroft this year under the new guidance of Bancroft Community Transit. There is also talk of the marathon paddlers and kayakers Ontario bring the Ontario championships to Bancroft as an add-on to this event.

Guest speaker and enterprise facilitator with Hastings County Mary Doyle added her voice to the dialogue next. Doyle spends a great deal of time traveling around the county speaking with entrepreneurs about their passions. Through these encounters she has come to realize how unique the needs of every business are. Although often left inspired by her work, Doyle said she remains silent when meeting with her clients so that she can pay closer attention to their vision.

?When you go into a community you shut up and listen to people, find out what their passions are, find it was they wanted to do with their time, their energy and their money and you try to help them find the resources that they need to make their dream come true, not yours. That's the only way you're actually going to build things in a community,? said Doyle.

Through her work Doyle has come to realize how important partnerships can be when it comes to building a successful business.

?When you get the right people together in a room magic happens,? she said.

?If you are struggling or know someone who is struggling ask for help, ask for some support. I might not have the answer, but I'll try my 'darndest' to try and find people who do have answers and can help. Don't wait until it's too late. In the last year I've seen so many businesses closed that probably could have stayed open if they would have asked for some help. It's confidential. Not even my board members know the people that I'm working with.?

For more information on the BBIA and what they have planned in 2015 visit www.beautifulbancroft.ca.