

Lemonade Project brings joy to South Algonquin



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By Michael Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The South Algonquin Business Association had its general meeting on May 29, the last one until September. It was held on the Zoom platform at 9 a.m. and by telephone conference call. SABA chair Evelyne Lesage, the Lemonade Project coordinator Angela Pollak, South Algonquin Township Councillor Bongo and IT expert Eric Lanning were all present. With the COVID-19 pandemic, much of their work has been delayed or altered to fit into the new normal of living with the virus and its restrictions. The May 29 meeting was meant to wrap up any loose ends until they meet again in the autumn.

Angela Pollak describes what their meetings are like, and says that they're not so much about resolving issues but getting involved, creating space for discussions and making progress on optimizing the experience of running a business in South Algonquin.

"We often disagree but we are also just as often able to come to a consensus on how to move forward because we all ultimately want the same thing: to build a strong and prosperous community."

The points we discuss often revolve around promotion, advocacy and communication. The meetings are about learning to work together to speak with a collective voice and sharing our skills and time for individual and community benefit. I would add that we try to take an asset-based community development approach, which means we agree to start the conversation with what we have and what we can do, not what we lack. People are encouraged to share their talents as they are able. We're careful to remind people not to give too much that they burn out because we are a small group with a lot of work ahead, and we want to be sustainable for the long haul. We're not perfect, it's definitely a work in progress. But we're discovering that our community is very generous. We have a wide range of talents and a lot of social capital in South Algonquin, which gives me optimism for a bright future," she says.

Evelyne Lesage describes what they'd like to accomplish at the May 29 meeting;

"Usually we've been having half hour meetings during COVID-19, but this is our monthly meeting. I know that one of our people, an IT person, got us all on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others. He's got us all registered so the next phase we're moving into is social media. Bongo took a lot of pictures for us all over the community so then on our website, if you're a member, you can download these pictures and use them for your advertising, on whatever forum you're using. We're hoping to have the funds to monitor and do our own sites for this whole region, South Algonquin. So, that's one big project is to get into the social media market. Because we're also connected to RTO12, because we're in the Muskoka district here and we've gotten ourselves on the map with

them now. We're the only place here, everything's over in Muskoka. We're part of Muskoka RTO12. So now that we're in place pretty much everything is on hold?our work is,? she says.

RTO12, referred to by Lesage, is one of 13 regional tourism organizations funded by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Also known by its consumer facing name, Explorers' Edge in the domestic market, and The Great Canadian Wilderness in the international market, RTO12 comes up with innovative tourism initiatives throughout the province to spur economic and social growth.

The May 29 SABA meeting came to order and the first item on the agenda was mentioning the cheque presentation the day before to Sandra Courneyea at the Algonquin Lunch Bar for her winning idea of the barbecue and Ice Cream stand in the Everyone Brings Joy contest. While she was given an oversized cheque for \$1,040 for photo purposes, the legitimate cheque was in her hands today.

After that, Evelyne inquired about the pictures that Councillor Bongo took at the cheque presentation. He said he had them ready and would send them by link for download to whomever was interested. Evelyne also suggested putting the link in the next SABA newsletter.

The next item on the agenda was about the township's new logo design. Bongo said that the township council will be voting on the new design on June 3, and will be further discussing it before the vote. He felt that council was divided on it, and that it might be a close vote. A discussion ensued where many in the meeting felt there should have been more feedback and consultation with the community before the design was done. While there were misgivings, including issues with the way the logo was tendered, the general consensus was the design was professionally and beautifully done, and that even with its drawbacks, it was a step in the right direction and moved the township forward in its branding ambitions. SABA decided to send a letter congratulating council on shepherding in the logo design, and leaving their criticisms of the process until a later date.

Eric Lanning, who has a local business called Eric- Fixes-IT, set up all their social media accounts. He set up Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Flickr accounts for the group. He said he's not done much to add content to any of them yet, but would figure out what to add over the coming weeks and months ahead. Angela suggested perhaps farming out each account to a member of the association to update regularly, so it doesn't all fall to Eric, which was met with approval. Bongo suggested checking out RTO12's websites Explorer's Edge and The Great Canadian Wilderness for content ideas to put on the new sites, and even suggested getting Kate from RTO12 [Kate Monk, senior director of strategy and communications] to help out. Angela countered by saying they should have a more definitive idea in place about what they may want to post before approaching Kate, and everyone agreed. Evelyne stressed how important it was for businesses to get on social media as it is invaluable for promotional purposes and is an advantage to the whole community.

The group then talked about getting maps printed off to take to the visitor centre at Algonquin Park. They said they'd email their treasurer Gabriella Hairabedian about this, who was not present, as she was detained at another meeting. Bongo said he had four or five bundles of maps, perhaps a few hundred maps in total, that he could run up to the visitors centre when it reopens. Evelyne agreed and thanked him. She said she'd looked into printing more and it would cost about \$700 to print off the 5,000 maps that are required. It was also suggested that using maps from last year would reduce costs. With the price of these maps on the table, attention turned to fundraising to be able to afford them. Holding bingo games was brought up, but according to Angela, SABA would need to be a certified, not for profit to run bingo, which it is not. It would take thousands of dollars to be incorporated and certified as a non profit, and that would be another financial hurdle to overcome. They elected to discuss this further at a sub committee fundraising meeting over the summer.

With that, they discussed when to have their next meeting and decided to have one during the first week of September, and then meet again in November. Over the summer, they'll focus on social media with Eric, and have the aforementioned fundraising sub committee to see about raising the money necessary to get incorporated, and be able to host bingo games to bring in more revenues. Evelyne then asked if there was any further business, and hearing that there wasn't, closed the meeting until SABA next meets in September.