

Local groups make ideas happen



From left, Ariel Weiner, Heather Inwood-Montrose, Carly O'Neill, Mikaela Hayes.

On Tuesday (June 21), 35 people representing small local businesses and non-profit community organizations came together at the Make Ideas Happen professional networking event. They discussed ways to nurture the growth of Bancroft's local economy and community through resource sharing and partnerships.

Make Ideas Happen is the brainchild of Carly O'Neill and Ariel Weiner, two local entrepreneurs who want to see small businesses and community organizations come together to support each other and address common problems.

O'Neill operates The Lakehouse Restaurant on Paudash Lake. Originally from the area, she had returned to start her restaurant, but found it difficult to meet like-minded professionals.

"I began discussing my experience with others and I realized the huge demand for something like a professional networking group," O'Neill explained. "Being a former event co-ordinator, I began the footwork needed to begin organizing something that would encourage creative collaboration and support the growth and success of local businesses and community organizations."

Weiner, who is new to the area, found it challenging to break into the business community when she took over the operating The Partista Espresso Bar at A Place For the Arts in Bancroft. "I just felt a bit out of the loop as a newcomer in Bancroft," she says, "[I] really wanted to find a community of engaged people who were interested in getting new projects off the ground."

The June 21 meeting at The Partista followed up on the first Make Ideas Happen event, which took place at The Lakehouse in April. The initial event drew more than 50 participants from as far away as Woodview and Lake St. Peter. It featured a keynote address by Carolyn Barker Brown of Bancroft Community Futures.

"It became immediately clear to us that there is a real need for this type of networking group," said Weiner. "There's lots of energy, and many exciting ideas percolating in the community, but people don't know where or how to connect with others in order to make these ideas happen."

Tuesday night's keynote address was delivered by Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick. He emphasized the importance of using Bancroft's natural and manufactured advantages to build a sustainable local economy.

Participants discussed some of the obstacles facing businesses and non-profits in the Bancroft region. They noted an unwillingness to embrace new ideas, the north and south county divide, the newcomer or cottager divide and much more.

Heather Inwood-Montrose, CEO of Community Care North Hastings, said that one of the most challenging obstacles facing small business in Bancroft is business owners feeling isolated in their ability to market themselves and grow.

"I would love to see the network try to address this by creating space to develop partnerships and offering strength in numbers to consider collective marketing," said Inwood-Montrose.

Participants agreed that Bancroft has traditionally had great difficulty marketing itself to tourists as a way of bringing business to the area.

"For many generations mining, logging, and government work has supported this community," Weiner observed. "Those days are coming to an end. If Bancroft is to grow and thrive into the future, we need to embrace new ideas."

"The goal [of Make Ideas Happen] is simple really," said O'Neill. "It's to create lasting partnerships and a professional community

here in Bancroft. We all have something to offer one another and the best strategy is to help each other move forward instead of holding each other back.?

The next Make Ideas Happen networking event will be held on July 26 at 6 p.m. at the Russwood Retreat, 28495. To RSVP or get more information contact Ariel Weiner at thepartista@gmail.com, or Carly O'Neill at thelakehousepoudash@gmail.com

Submitted by Sherwood Hines