



# YOUR DOWNTOWN: Vitality & Variety



By Russ Disotell

In the continuing battle, downtown business areas face to retain, and grow, their share of the retail market, “There are so many opportunities available”. So says Brockville DBIA Executive Director, Meghan Plooy. “The challenge is to prioritize and decide which to start with.” She points out that Brockville isn’t alone in this, “We’re not the only DBIA facing these challenges.”

In an effort to share experiences “First Impressions Team Brockville” has been formed to visit other cities and discuss challenges and learn from successes, and approaches that might not have worked as well. Other DBIA’s are invited back to Brockville for a similar information sharing session here. “This approach benefits all of our businesses and customers.”

On the local scene, the DBIA has a number of committees working at promoting the downtown, beautification, events and promotions, as well as economic development. Beautification is tasked with keeping the downtown’s appearance

appealing and attractive. Events and promotions deals with matters such as sidewalk sales and is presently working on developing shoulder season events. The shoulder season can be roughly equated to the months leading into and following the prime time summer period. Economic development is the committee that focuses on initiatives that involve the attraction and retention of businesses.

“Lately, we have had a number of great people opening new shops in downtown Brockville”, Plooy enthused. Rhiannon Wolfram opened The Closet Consignment across from the LCBO. It is a women’s and children’s consignment outlet that fills a niche. The River Lily Boutique and proprietor Nicole Holmyard garnered a lot of interest with their launch during downtown’s first sidewalk sale of the season. Aaron’s Arcade & Toys recently set up shop on Perth Street. RD Athletics, offering therapy and training just recently opened on the second floor above Family Physiotherapy.

On the culinary side of things the Union Jack Pub has opened in the former Isaac Brock location. As well The Sleepless Monkey has opened a second location on King St. across from Kincaid. “All of these people and businesses believe downtown is where they should be and they’ve all opened in the last month or two. It shows the resilience of the downtown.”

When it comes to expressing reasons why people should patronize the downtown, Plooy has a simple, yet compelling answer. “Shop local, eat local, spend local and explore local. Simply put, support where you live, work and play.”

Prescott has launched a pair of initiatives in an effort to promote business in their downtown core. The Town of Prescott and the Business Improvement Area Board of Management hired a Joint Coordinator to promote business in the downtown core as well as coordinating the effort to create sustainable tourism programs and special events.



Food Vendor selling assorted meats/sausages/cheeses @ BIA Flea Market @ Leo Boivin Arena, Prescott

Stephen Crossman, who is a former board member of the BIA, owner of Nifty and Thrifty Collectibles & Antiques on King St. in Prescott, headed the campaign for the creation of a summer long flea market that opened in May. The hope is that by attracting shoppers to the Saturday flea market, located at the Leo Boivin Community Centre, they can be redirected to the downtown business area and other nearby attractions. 100% of profits from the flea market will be used for downtown beautification.

The Prescott Farmers & Crafters Market also helps bring traffic to the downtown (at the Clock Tower) in the spring and summer season. The St Lawrence Shakespeare Festival starts its season this summer from July 18th to August 22nd. The performances are at the amphitheatre on the waterfront near the downtown.

Lisa Bird of the Gananoque DBIA says that, "Gananoque is a town with a population of 5,200, but in the summer it's more like 365,000! Obviously we are reliant on tourism in the summer." The secret of attracting tourists is offering a variety of unique shopping options and a wide range of culinary experiences. Gan's outstanding roster of restaurants would be quite impressive for a centre two or three times its size.

"One of our newest restaurants is the Sushi Sun and we were quite pleased to have a business of their reputation fill a niche for us", enthused Lisa. "They were voted CTV Ottawa's Best Sushi and this is their second location. They came to check out our downtown and liked what they saw." A very successful social media marketing campaign

helped make the new Sushi Sun an instant success.

Adding new and different restaurants to an already impressive collection is one way to keep the downtown fresh. Madilee's Cupcakes is a gourmet cupcake bakery that has a speciality chipolte cupcake "that is to die for", says Lisa. Places like The Socialist Pig, Panache and The Maple Leaf Restaurant have established followings throughout the area, some even further. The Maple Leaf has a worldwide reputation for their signature spaetzle, a traditional Bohemian egg noodle/dumpling dish.

Given the number of wonderful restaurants it should be no surprise that they are featured in the Gourmets in Gananoque festival, celebrating its fourth year on August 8th. The event is spread across the downtown in conjunction with a sidewalk sale. "It allows us to strengthen our partnerships with community non-profits while celebrating our international cuisine. The Afro-Caribbean Association of Kingston attends every year and helps broaden the spectrum of flavours.

No discussion of downtown Gananoque would be complete without mention of Donevan's Hardware, a 5th generation family run hardware store and a cornerstone of the community. Not many businesses can say they are family owned and operated since 1872. It is the ideal spot for hard to find items and old-fashioned quality service.

Lisa points out, that's the thing about downtowns. "You find merchandise you won't find in chain stores. It's unique and quite often higher quality. Service is more personal because you're dealing with the stores owner and this is their passion. The

atmosphere is vibrant and homey and there's plenty to choose from."

This fall will see the launch of a "Re-discovering Gananoque" initiative. "We rely on locals in off-shoulder seasons and this is their downtown core." Workshops are held on a regular basis for merchants to bring them up to date on new trends and help disseminate information. "We're also connecting with other BIA's such as Napanee and Picton comparing notes." Echoing Meghan's remark, Lisa adds, "All downtowns are facing challenges and we can all benefit by sharing solutions on moving ahead." LH

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** All downtowns play a vital role in a community's social and economic livelihood. Each of these 3 communities are trying different approaches to try and keep shopping local and improving the business climate in their respective areas.

Local downtown merchants offer a lot to a community, they donate goods and services to service clubs and local non profit organizations. A lot of those businesses are members of their respective Chambers of Commerce. We, at Living Here, ask our readers, before you go shopping at a big box store or think about cross border shopping, SHOP LOCAL in your Downtown and help support your local business community.

For Events or Information about your local DBIA check out their websites @ [www.downtownbrockville.com](http://www.downtownbrockville.com) or [www.downtowngananoque.com](http://www.downtowngananoque.com) or [www.prescott.ca](http://www.prescott.ca)