

Community group working to get Carleton Place moving

By LAURIE McVICAR

More than a year after they formed to change the economic direction of Carleton Place, the Business Building Attraction and Retention (B-BAR) group is beginning to make some headway. Members of the organization now sit on an ad hoc committee whose sole purpose is to map the future of the fast expanding community.

During a recent interview with *Business Today*, Graham Whitelaw, B-BAR spokesperson, explained the birth of the organization and the progress it has made over the past year, including securing representation on a potentially influential municipal committee.

"B-BAR was started about a year-and-a-half ago by a guy named Ross Blaine. He was interested in turning around the town of Carleton Place and making it a more vibrant and self-sufficient community," said Whitelaw. "He contacted a number of people in the community in order to get something going, including the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement Association (BIA), and the town council. There wasn't a whole lot of interest, so he started to develop a series of workshops which generated a lot of interest from the community."

Input provided by the workshop participants indicated a common feeling that the community wasn't moving fast enough to address the issue of economic development.

"This is a high growth area because of its closeness to Ottawa and we now have a four lane highway coming at us. We're concerned that the growth is going to rule us, instead of us managing the growth," said Whitelaw.

As a result of the workshops, attended by more than 275 citizens, 173 recommendations were made.

"We sent up a task force to present it to council, which was done last May," said Whitelaw. "What we asked for was some funding to continue what we had started, particularly around data collection in the community. We wanted to expand beyond the 275 participants to make sure the entire community supported the recommendations being made."

The recommendations reflected B-BAR's main mission.

"We'd like to have a comprehensive economic development plan for Carleton Place. We always want to have an organization which has on its board, representation from across the community, which would include the chamber, the BIA, the arts, sports and recreation, and town council. That board would direct the activities of a full-time economic development officer for Carleton Place," said Whitelaw. "For a variety of reasons, there wasn't a unified agreement at council. What we ended up with was pushing council into kicking off a strategic planning process."

The ad hoc committee also includes representation from the Chamber of Commerce, the BIA and the marketing and promotions committee.

"We've had a couple of meetings and the strategic planning is underway. We have some concerns how that's moving forward," said Whitelaw. "Our number one concern is that ad hoc committee doesn't have full representation from the various community groups."

"Our other concern is that there hasn't been enough thought put into what we want to get out of this process," he added. "If we don't have clear objectives, it's difficult to design a process to get the correct information. Our fear is that we're not going to end up with a comprehensive economic development plan, but instead a community strategic plan with economic directions. Then we'll have to spend more time and money in developing an economic development plan from that."

It's for reasons such as this that B-BAR now finds itself in an evolution phase. "B-BAR was originally designed as a process to get community involvement leading to an economic development plan and having it fully implemented. We were just trying to facilitate that," said Whitelaw. "Because we've been running into various roadblocks with the council primarily, we have decided to organize ourselves and we've put together an interim board of directors and we're moving ahead of several initiatives to achieve our goal."

One of the more visible initiatives was the group's "I Am a Stakeholder Campaign" which was designed to raise awareness

of economic development prior to the municipal elections.

"We prepared hundreds of wood stakes, created a website called iamastakeholder.com and we had a roll out at the Mississippi Hotel in late September. We encouraged people to put a stake in their lawn to show their support," said Whitelaw. "It was a very successful campaign. We distributed about 600 stakes."

B-BAR also hopes to tackle the issue of retaining local youth.

"They are the future of Carleton Place. As a father

and employer of people with teenagers, most can't wait to get out of Carleton Place. Why is that? Because the job opportunities and salaries available in Carleton Place are not as good as elsewhere. We can change that," said Whitelaw. "If we keep on the track of being a bedroom community to Ottawa, we won't have the jobs that attract youth. If we shift our focus to encourage more industry like light manufacturing, which pays more, there will be more potential for keeping youth here."

According to Whitelaw,

B-BAR has already begun approaching Carleton Place high school students in hopes of forming a youth council.

"We've made a presentation to students at CPHS and are scheduling one for students at Notre Dame High School for February," he said. "We have issues, not only about employment. People are bored here and want to have fun. The youth need to tell us what they want."

At the other end of the spectrum, B-BAR plans to focus on seniors as well.

"We have a team of seniors who are interested

in a mentoring program," said Whitelaw. "We're going to be putting some focus into tapping into the experience and skill base of our seniors to help new entrepreneurs or youth."

I think we've been successful in positioning ourselves at the table. We see ourselves as the economic development watchdogs. We have a lot of skills and abilities within our ranks and a lot of people who have volunteered hundreds of hours to support our initiatives."

For more information on B-BAR, log onto www.iamastakeholder.com.

Store closure benefits residents of Haiti, Congo

By LAURIE McVICAR

Ken's Discount Shoe Store in Carleton Place may have closed its doors for good, however its 'clientele' is about to get a whole lot bigger.

Approximately 100 pairs of shoes will be sent to residents in the Congo and a further 1,800 to residents in Haiti thanks to the generosity of owner Ken Blackburn.

Blackburn has made other significant donations in the past, including several to the local Salvation Army. In 2004, he donated 150 pairs of shoes to residents in Haiti. He increased the donation to 200 pairs last year.

"I know that the people in Haiti really need the shoes and they appreciate it," said Blackburn.

In addition, his donations have made it possible for three Haitian women to start their own shoe stores. The merchandise is sent to the country by the Almonte Presbyterian Church. Collecting the shoes on their behalf from Blackburn was Jeff Mills.

"It's a very, very generous donation and a wonderful way for him to end his business. Those shoes could have ended up in a dumpster somewhere," said Mills. "I think he tried to donate them to other places, but no one wanted them. The people in Haiti will put them to good use."

Blackburn has done business in Carleton Place for over 40 years. The long-time entrepreneur cited tough competition and a desire to retire as his reason for closing.



-Business Today photos by JOHN GRAYDON

Above, Ken's Discount Shoes owner Ken Blackburn (right) loads up boxes of shoes with help from Jeff Mills. Below, a hard-working crew cleans out what remains in the shop which has been a Carleton Place staple for more than 40 years.



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the business community," said Pond.

Following lunch, Robert Dupuis, director with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Eastern Region, will provide an update on employment in Ontario.

"The last part of the day will be a question and answer session with a panel of speakers. We haven't confirmed who will be there, however two will be experts in labour market and two will be representatives from

industry in this area," said Pond.

To pre-register for the forum, log on to www.customerconnects.com/events.php.

The Carleton Heritage Inn is located at 7 Bridge Street, Carleton Place.