

King City businesses identify needs at forum

By Mark Pavilons

Marketing businesses in King City and revamping its core are on the minds of local business owners.

These issues, as well as some success stories, were presented to a packed house at Hogan's Inn last week, for the King City Business Forum, sponsored by the King Chamber of Commerce and the Township. This was the third installment of these networking initiatives, which will likely continue in the future, given their success.

Chamber president Tom Allen welcomes the input from owners in these brainstorming sessions. Getting a handle on local concerns will help the Chamber make businesses thrive.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said the Township and its pro-business council are here to help. He admitted there's been a lack of communication in the past about what services are available, but hopefully the message is getting out. There are "incredible success stories" in King.

One such story is the constant evolution carried out by Emily Fiorentino, owner of Kid's Country. The clothing store is entering its 29th year of operation, and Fiorentino is the second owner, but she's been involved for many years. As an established business, she's revamping it and taking it to the next level.

That means plugging away every day to stay current. Being aware of clients' needs, keeping in touch through social media and updating her website all help to keep her business on track. She's worked hard to "keep" her clients and she enjoys many long-distance relationships with clients from across the country.

Business owners, she said, must have a willingness to change and evolve.

The business core on Keele Street has some challenges that include traffic and a lack of parking.

Events like the business forum are great opportunities to meet with other business owners and "pick their brains."

"This type of forum is vital," she said.

Business owners always have to ask themselves "what am I going to do today to stay in the game?"

Fiorentino pointed out she enjoyed some assistance and funding from the Township's CIP program. This helped pay for some new signage for her shop.

Another business owner has a clear vision of what he'd like to see in King City.

Ryan Knight, owner of Chic Eyes Optical Inc., is closing in on his first-year anniversary at King's Ridge Marketplace.

Following in his father's footsteps, Knight said opening his business in King is "the best thing I ever did. I'm very happy to be here. It's a dream come true."

Marketing, though, is a bit of a challenge, given the restrictions of roadside signage implemented by the Township. He finds these to be effective for his business and he hopes there can be a compromise down the road.

Mayor Pellegrini pointed out the sign bylaw is the Township's most current document and they're very particular about signage. King is trying to portray itself as an upscale community and roadside signs, especially mobile signs, are out of the question. He did admit, however, that King's Ridge is the township's first real outdoor plaza and council would be "all ears" for any suggestions. King City has a bit of a split personality - new business are flocking to the King's Ridge centre, yet the traditional core is on Keele, south of King.

Some of the business owners said the village needs a focal point and some more amenities like parks, streetscaping and lighting.

Parking, sidewalk improvements and facades were also mentioned.

Community boards in common areas would be a way for businesses to get the word out. More lighting is needed at the Wellseley Park lot.

One woman suggested expanding the "core" on Keele to north of King Road.

Marketing King City outside of the area as a destination, is key to attracting business. Most agreed some "shop local" promotion would help and others urged the creation of a website for King City businesses.

Jamie Smyth, King's economic development officer, said the Township works with established village associations and is always willing to help promote business in King. His department has created several measures to help market King, including the "Experience King" series of videos on the Township's website.