

Business leaders gather to promote Nobleton

By Mark Pavilons

There's a buzz among Nobleton area business owners.

During the first-ever Nobleton Business Forum held last week, stakeholders got a chance to review shortcomings and look for solutions to improve the business climate in and around the village.

Close to 50 people attended the event at Raffaele's Cantina, hosted by the King Chamber of Commerce and King Township.

Chamber president Tom Allen was ecstatic at the turnout and amount of input during the evening that included information and working group sessions to ferret out local concerns. "The buzz is phenomenal," Allen observed.

Local businesses, he stressed, are integral to the community and their knowledge is vital.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said his council has always been pro-business, creating an atmosphere for businesses to flourish. As one of the biggest cheerleaders for King and its businesses, Pellegrini said forums like this are important. "If I need to say more, tell me!" he told the crowd.

He pointed out that King just passed bylaw changes that provide financial relief for small business expansions.

From King's Official Plan and Nobleton zoning bylaw, input from businesses play a role in these important decisions, said Councillor David Boyd, who was instrumental in encouraging business leaders to attend the forum.

"It's important to have local input to help shape the framework," he said. On tap for Nobleton are beautification, streetscaping and a banner program, to name a few.

Nobleton will go through some changes in the coming years. York Region plans to widen Highway 27 through the "core" area in 2017. Plans for the subdivision at the former wrecking yard will get going and new businesses continue to set up shop in the village.

All of this sets the stage for some remarkable growth and the onus is on the local businesses to capture more of the market.

Multi-generation business owner Alf Budweth said success lies in consistency. As operator of the oldest mill north of the city, Nobleton Feed Mill has had to evolve and go after new markets. It has done this well and their concentration on the equine industry has allowed them to help some 17 Queen's Plate winners.

John Ciarallo, owner of John's No Frills, said he would like to see more residential growth to support local businesses. In 2016, it's expensive to do business in this country and his is based on volume growth. His core support comes from King but he can't survive on that alone. Attracting customers from outside the area, including Bolton and even Aurora, are important.

He believes local businesses have to aggressively market outside of King, to entice the growing numbers in Bolton, Kleinburg, Maple and Aurora.

"I'd like to see dedicated marketing in those areas," he said.

Guests were asked to point out some areas of concern. A lack of parking, comprehensive sidewalk access and property standards were all mentioned. It was pointed out that Nobleton is a bit "fragmented" in that businesses are spread out and there is no defining "core" per se. Recent development has taken place north of the four corners and there is a lot taking place south of the village as well.

Branding and marketing were mentioned as ways to help promote Nobleton. King council, as part of its 2016 budget, approved an additional \$19,000 for the Economic Development department to further promote the municipality through its "Experience King" program.

The Township does have a role to play in all of this. One woman mentioned the Township can promote shopping locally, spotlight local businesses on a regular basis on their website, and pump more dollars into community improvement.

Boyd stressed there is money available for local improvements, through Community Improvement Plan grants. All you have to do is apply and Jamie Smyth, King's economic development officer, can help walk businesses through the process.

Others thought improved signage "welcome signs, etc." would help spread the word and encourage commuters to stop and shop.

One resident said the Chamber could improve its visibility by making an effort to visit every village and every business.

Capitalizing on local events is another area where businesses can thrive. King hosts more than one event per week throughout the year. From hockey tournaments and festivals, to equestrian events and holiday fireworks, there are opportunities for promotion and sales.

Smyth pointed out there needs to be more collaborative efforts.

Currently, his department is running a ShopKING promotional survey, asking residents to evaluate local businesses and make suggestions. This data will be collected and be distributed.

Others in the crowd felt some sort of market analysis study would be helpful in pinpointing just where shoppers are coming from.