

News & Views

A NEWSLETTER FOR BIA STAFF AND BOARDS | January 2012 | Vol. 3 No. 1

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

FINDING OUR WAY

A pedestrian wayfinding signage system is finally in the works in Toronto. The City's Public Realm section of Transportation Services, the folks behind the Astral street furniture, have retained consultants to develop the system. This system was motivated by the coming of the 2015 Pan Am Games, followed by the realization that Toronto is one of a few big cities without a wayfinding system or visitor centre.

TABIA has been sitting in on the Stakeholders' Advisory Committee, and many BIA members attended a general consultation meeting at Metro Hall in December. TABIA's major concern with the new system is that we need to have every BIA included. The fact is 80 per cent of all tourists stay with their friends and relatives, right in our Toronto neighbourhoods. This could be a very unifying and positive project as long as every community sees that it is connected.

A system will be designed that is unique to Toronto and will then be installed over a few years. We are told it will contain internet and smart-phone connectivity as well as "finger pointer" signs and maps.

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Imaginative graphic design captures the Riverside District BIA's event promotions. See pg. 2.

THE YEAR AHEAD

By John Kiru, Executive Director, TABIA

MONTHLY MEETINGS- THE NEW MANTRA

We are committed to all 72 of our BIAs. Our sole intention is help each BIA thrive and prosper. To help you in that quest, we hope you continue to attend the monthly interdepartmental meetings and keep feeding us suggestions of topics of interest and importance to you. We prefer to present these issues before they become problems on the street. To do that, we meet with appropriate staff, both in the City and in other realms, to try and circumvent the latest "rules" before they are etched in stone and then we give you the scoop.

The meetings allow coordinators, managers and Board members the opportunity to ask questions of leading decision makers and exchange valuable information. If you haven't yet decided if it's worth the two-hour time expenditure, you might want to give it a try.

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KUDOS!

This regular column recognizes significant accomplishments taking place in our BIAs. This month we highlight **Riverside District BIA's creative events**. Let us know what you've done so we can spread the good news!

Talk about clever marketing...! The name of Riverside District BIA's annual fall event, "Take a Walk on the Riverside," conjures up excitement, glamour, and especially, the unknown! And that pretty well defines what this daring BIA has been doing this past year—presenting small, unusual events that highlight all aspects of their community and entice the locals as well as people from further afield into their neighbourhood. And it's been working.

Take a Walk on the Riverside is a real showcase for the neighbourhood. Guided tours that focused on the history and architecture were a huge hit in this 14-block BIA. Self-guided tours were also very popular because each person could individually discover history and culture as well as the businesses in the area. Riverside District BIA's Director Sapna Alim says that the event has grown considerably in three years. Her estimates conclude that over 6,000 people attended this year, and businesses reported their largest sales of the year. Even though this BIA has slightly more than 100 businesses, approximately half of them participated in the event with interesting offerings or in-store specials. And community partners like the Ralph Thornton Centre were also important participants.

"Sounds like the Riverside" is an outdoor musical festival and celebration at the beginning of the summer. Last year it was held at three different stages, each one catering to a different musical stream. Bars and restaurants added programming to draw in customers. It was organized to coincide with the Riverdale Artwalk or RAW which is a popular event organized by a strong local artist network.

This December, the BIA inaugurated its "Light Up the Riverside" holiday event with the trees on the street adorned with battery-operated red lanterns and stores showcasing competitive window displays. Retailers showed their appreciation towards customers with various discounts and promos.

Due to Riverside District BIA's small budget, it's important the BIA doesn't spend much on their events. Instead they channel their limited funds into good design and PR and then get terrific support from local businesses and sponsors in the way of product donations, reduced costs and even donated time and effort.



A local printer and a talented designer pitch in to help defray costs for the BIA's events

NEWS TO USE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS AND MANAGERS

IS YOUR BIA ACCESSIBLE?

New regulations take effect this month. <http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/programs/accessibility/> Consider attending a seminar given by **Enterprise Toronto on Jan. 11 at 10 a.m.** at Toronto City Hall, Comm. Rm. 3, to learn more. Will you be ready?

LOOKING FOR A UNIQUE EVENT?

Does your BIA need an event? Ideally, you'd capitalize on an historic event, an unusual geological formation, local flora or fauna or even famous former residents. Maybe there's an event that garnered attention a few years ago that could be resurrected. To inspire you, here are some events, gleaned

from the *Downtown Promotion Reporter*, that various U.S. downtowns have used to entice people to their area (Just remember, silly is OK!):

- Miss Crustacean Pageant, in the small surfside town of Ocean City, NJ
- Frog Jump Festival in Valley City, Ohio
- Pie Day in Braham, Minnesota
- Girls' Night Out with its tag line of "Sass in the City," in Rochester, Michigan. Various offshoots include Girlfriend's Day and Sister's Day.
- National Blueberry Festival, South Haven, Michigan
- Dog Days (of Summer) Downtown Events in Wilmington, Maryland, including a downtown scavenger hunt for dogs and their owners!



The ever-changing patriotic streetscape of Emery Village

PROFILE: Emery Village BIA

BIG!

How big can a BIA be? Apparently there are no limits to the size of the Emery Village BIA, which echoes their working philosophy: there are simply no limits to what can be achieved!

This BIA became official in 2005 and has expanded its boundaries twice in the last five years. From 1,300 businesses, it has grown to over 2,500 businesses, stretching from the 401 to Steeles, and from the 400 Highway to the Humber River. According to Sandra Farina, the Executive Director, only two per cent are retail. The others are commercial or industrial, which makes it a “little challenging,” Sandra admits. There are pockets of residential areas and subdivisions within the boundaries.

Given the small number of retail stores, some might wonder why the BIA began. Sandra said there was great concern in the area about banks and other businesses leaving because the area was not safe. Crime would move in when a business moved out. The businesses had the notion that they could improve the area, make it a lot safer and more desirable, and they were right.

Now they have a security firm with up to four cars patrolling at key hours, seven days a week. When they first began, the local police were sceptical. Nowadays the security firm is often first on the scene, and they tend to the aftermath, as well. The police respect the work that’s being done and now share vital information with the firm. The BIA also actively participates on the local Community Police Liaison Committee.

In addition to security problems, the businesses in the area wanted to be able to keep and entice other businesses. Now, they have businesses begging them to expand their boundaries so they can be part of a successful BIA.

BEAUTIFYING THE STREET

Given that the area is so vast, it was, and still is, a monumental task to consider beautification. Emery Village has taken the Canadian flag as its starting point to create a distinctive look. Sandra said that the members love all types of projects. Their philosophy is: “When the levy stays in your own pocket, you can manage and prioritize your needs.”

“Everyone said it couldn’t be done. We’ve proven it can, and it works!”

Their first streetscaping was the creation of a giant maple leaf out of pavers at an important gateway. Then they created blue borders around the curbs, erected solar-paneled LED signs, installed benches and planters. Stonewall historical markers and murals are part of the mix. They plan on at least one to two projects per year. Some go far beyond expectations such as actual street repair.

At last count 48 flags dot the boulevard along Arrow Road. When a soldier falls, the flags are raised and lowered according to federal protocol. At least 300 businesses have their own flags, each with an officially sanctioned BIA flag pole.

BOARD MATTERS

Emery Village has a strong Board composed of 13 members who meet frequently. Sandra says there’s a good balance between “mom and pop operations” and large corporations. Board Chair is Lorraine Chabot-Vecera, business owner. Members of the Board sit on the following

committees: security, streetscape, transportation (when the LRT was an issue), historical and the newest, the environmental committee.

City Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti sits ex officio on the Board. “There’s no one who works harder than him to push things along,” said Sandra. “He comes to every single meeting and is a huge supporter,” she added.

EVENTS

Events would seem out of place in a BIA without much retail so they’ve had very few traditional events. A very popular annual charity golf tournament ensures a healthy donation to Habitat for Humanity (which the Board and staff also personally support with their volunteer hours) and the Maggie Sanderson Child Care Centre. Following the lead of a developer who donated the space for this centre, the BIA wants to subsidize fees for the children of BIA employees.

Most recently, the BIA was the sole sponsor of the City of Toronto’s Santa Claus Parade Red Nose Program. All kids who wore the red nose got free TTC rides on parade day, and the program supports the training of the Air Cadets. In exchange the BIA received a lot of media attention.

The BIA is currently considering holding a late summer festival in one of their newer Humber Summit pocket that has the most retail stores. They envision a two-day international wine festival with the old-style street-fest tasting huts.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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UPCOMING EVENTS AND DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

HERE'S THE INFO YOU NEED NOW, FOR YOU, YOUR BOARD AND YOUR MEMBERS

Third Tues. of each month-

TABIA inter-departmental meetings

City Hall, from 2-4 p.m. These are great sources of information on the latest news coming from City Hall or issues affecting BIAs. Questions? Contact Patricia at TABIA at 416-263-3229.

Enterprise Toronto – programs and seminars for business people

Check the Enterprise Toronto website each month and register for Enterprise Toronto's Evening Seminar Series.

Now that Facebook has added the Timeline feature, maybe your businesses would be interested in showcasing themselves using larger images, as one possibility. **Getting Started with Facebook** is a seminar on **Jan. 17 at 10 a.m.** at North York Civic Centre. More info at: www.enterprisetoronto.com or contact them at enterprisetoronto@toronto.ca

AT THE BIAS

Jan. 23, 28 and 29- Chinese New Year Festivities- Chinatown Centre at 222 Spadina Ave. www.chinatownbia.com

Apr. 22-25 – 2012 National BIA Conference in Thunder Bay. <http://www.obiaa.com>

LET US KNOW ABOUT YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS. Send details to Patricia at TABIA who will publicize it on the TABIA website and share the info with *News & Views*. info@toronto-bia.com

FINDING OUR WAY (cont.)

To be totally successful it should work with or include all other wayfinding signage systems like the Path, CNE, TTC and GO systems.

Confusion arises because Astral Media and Transportation Services have just introduced 120 sidewalk billboards which include "Info to Go" wayfinding maps and an unspecified number of information-only pillars. The scale, purpose and placement of these pedestrian eye-level advertisements have caused some concern in several BIAs. The "Info to Go" mapping was developed by the street furniture designers without consulting stakeholders such as the BIAs, leaving out pertinent and valuable information of interest to locals and tourists alike. I believe the City should have known of these simultaneous initiatives and held back the wayfinding signage to coordinate with one single coordinated wayfinding strategy.

It is my fear that these advertising pillars, which guarantee more clutter on our sidewalks, have predetermined the built form of future wayfinding. We strongly encourage all BIAs to get involved by studying the new wayfinding strategy over the next few months. http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/walking/pdf/wayfinding_stakeholder_interview_handout.pdf

The design consultants are Steer, Davies, Gleave <http://www.steerdaviesgleave.com>

Michael Comstock

TABIA President,
Representing St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA



THE YEAR AHEAD (cont.)

SOME PENDING STREET ISSUES

We've been meeting with Toronto Hydro to clarify the use of street poles along your streetscapes and to urge them to continue with energy conservation initiatives which assist BIA members with retrofits. We've been working with various policy makers on the placement of A-frames and other street furniture in the public realm. Although, we've had a few successes, we keep trying to make everything simpler for you in your day-to-day dealings. That also applies to the Chapter 19 legislation – allowing BIAS to operate in a simple and transparent manner.

TTC SEE- SAW

As noted to you earlier, we've been collaborating with the TTC about giving BIAs a better fee break during their festivals. So far, the first \$10,000 is the BIA's cost, but the remainder will be split 50-50 with the TTC. We continue to discuss their festival fare calculations to try and lessen them even further.

UP AND AWAY IN THUNDER BAY

The upcoming April BIA conference in Thunder Bay is just a few months away. Even with a great array of topical issues that will be addressed, we are still open to suggestions for round table discussions. Our usual important vendors have signed up to go the distance and we hope you will, too. In addition to BIAs from across Ontario, you'll get to meet BIA reps from Canada and the northern U.S.

We have been working with Porter Airlines to get charter flight rates so stay tuned. Or, you can nab their extra good sale rates now which will get you there and back, with all taxes included, for approximately \$300. The Thunder Bay team is working hard to put on an extraordinary conference. I also invite you to hike the impressive Sleeping Giant with me, after the conference, so build in that extra day and start building up your hiking muscles!

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Contact TABIA at info@toronto-bia.com or 416-263-3295.
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TABIA Board Executive

President: Michael Comstock, *St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA*
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This newsletter is also produced electronically and can be found at www.toronto-bia.com