

Colborne, lovely but tired, needs to make itself interesting to visitors

By John Campbell

Colborne – Colborne is a beautiful, charming, quaint community but it's "a little bit tired" and in need of variety in the downtown to make it interesting enough for people passing through to stop for a visit and stay awhile.

So says a group from Cannington who took part in a

provincial program, First Impressions Community Exchange, in which delegations from two communities visit each other unannounced to provide an outsider's perspective on what they see, both strengths and challenges.

Cannington's team visited Colborne in September and returned Nov. 26 to report on what they discovered at a pub-



Sherri Hamilton, manager of the Brighton-Cramahe Chamber of Commerce, said the Cannington group's impressions of Colborne has helped push forward a local initiative to improve the downtown. Photo by John Campbell
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lic meeting held at the Keeler Centre.

Sherri Hamilton, manager of the Brighton-Cramahe Chamber of Commerce, which led Cramahe Township's participation in the exchange, said the report presented by Terry Sellers and Barb Smith will help Cramahe Township "move forward" with its plans for the village.

The two gave their group's impressions of Colborne in a number of areas, as set out in a template designed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which initiated the exchange program in 2005. Areas examined include housing, education, health care, recreation, tourism, in-

dustrial development, and heritage.

Colborne's assets include its Ecology Park ("a community gem"), "lovely heritage architecture," clean streets, ample parking, Victoria Square, and its "most outstanding feature, the elevated boulevard," Smith said.

"That really is a striking area [and] would attract tourists if there was something just a little bit more to actually do there," Sellers said. "You do have some positive stuff" and with a few more shopping and dining options to entice people to stop, "your fortunes can turn around."

Sellers said there aren't any places that cater to "discre-

tionary spending, all the things that people spend money on that they don't have to spend money on."

"That's the part that draws people from outside your community."

The Big Apple "is obviously a massive draw" but Colborne hasn't taken advantage of the huge opportunity it presents to pull people into the downtown. There isn't signage to let people leaving the Big Apple know the downtown even exists, Sellers said.

The Cannington group's solutions included introducing a high-end cafe in the downtown and recreational activities such as a rock climbing wall and a skateboard and BMX bike park.

County Road 2 is "becoming more popular as a route" for people on motorcycles and cyclists or who belong to a sports car club, which is "a great opportunity" for Colborne, Sellers said.

Baby boomers, in particular, are now retiring and "looking for things to do," he said. One of them will be taking little trips "rediscovering all the small towns they used to go to when they were younger."

Following their presentation, Hamilton said there was lots "to digest and work with. Certainly as a community, we're going to take this information and ... see what we can do to make the best of it."

"This has really gone a long way to helping us move on to the next step."

Hamilton said afterwards the chamber is "working pretty hard" with the



Colborne has a beautiful downtown but it's "a little bit tired" and in need of variety to make it more interesting to visitors. Photo by John Campbell

Big Apple to figure out how to get people who go there to then travel to the downtown.

The next step will be look at "what are the easy, low-hanging fruit" to tackle first and then the things that will require much more effort.

Hamilton said the chamber is interested in continuing to work with the municipality on what is a council initiative.

Mayor Marc Coombs said he hopes to form a committee of businesspeople and interested citizens to "start moving ahead" with some of the suggestions put forward that night.

Once you get "people who are really proactive and positive about the community" working together on the same page, it "makes a huge difference," he said.

Coombs agreed with Sellers that "people driving through need a reason to stop and we've got to start thinking about that."

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260 Festival of Trees blossoms

By John Campbell

Colborne – The Festival of Trees

was another "great success," raising approximately \$10,000 for the music program at Colborne Public School.

The festival was held at the Colborne Legion over two days, Nov. 27-28.

The money was raised equally through the sale of raffle tickets, a silent auction and corporate sponsorships in support of the Memorial Tree that honours the memories of nine children in the community who have passed away over the years.

Twenty-five decorated trees were up for grabs, through the luck of the draw or the highest bid.

The money raised "means everything," Morford said, because the festival is the only source of funds for the music program, which runs from Grade 3 to 8.

It pays for the repair and upkeep of instruments and the purchase of new ones, as well as uniforms, bus-ing and entrance fees. It also covers about 50 per cent of the cost of an overnight trip, said Morford, who, with his wife Lorraine, organizes the festival.

A mini-concert was held at the Legion the opening night of the festival, featuring the school's drum line and a brand-new ukelele band that's been organized in the community, with members ranging from adolescents to seniors.

The Legion provides the venue at no charge and the trees are donated by J and D Christmas Trees.



Autumn Corbeil holds a photo of her sister Lizzy who died eight years ago at the age of 12. Lizzy and eight other children who died young – Mitchell Ferguson, Erin Reed, Kevin and Brandon Cote, Robyn and Erick Taylor, Kandas Derry and Kaitlyn Bates – were once again honoured with their photographs on a Memorial Tree as part of the Festival of Trees. Photo by John Campbell.