

BIA plots downtown development strategy

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
Image improvement, tourist promotions and long-term goal setting top this year's agenda for the Acton Business Improvement Area (BIA) committee.

"Our merchants are just fading away and we must do something to revive the downtown," said BIA co-chairperson Roberta Holmes in an interview last Wednesday.

"With 300,000 people coming to Acton every year to shop at the olde Hide House, we have to look at ways to encourage them to take a look at what else Acton has to offer.

"The run-of-the-mill merchants, like clothing and shoe stores, just do not get enough support from our local people to survive. The only ones that seem to be doing well are the olde Hide House and places

like the Doll Emporium," Holmes said.

Last month, a consultant with Heritage Canada suggested the BIA should decide who it wants to attract to town and then plot some long-range strategies. Holmes said it looks like they will take that advice.

"None of us in the BIA know why we can't attract and keep the kind of stores we need for the tourist trade or for local residents, but in the coming months we will try to get some input and co-operation from our members to encourage downtown development."

Holmes admitted there is a fine line between servicing visitors and residents. "We don't want to disregard the people of Acton. We don't want to put in a bunch of stores that sell things Acton resi-

dents don't need, but the big question is, how do we satisfy both?"

Holmes said when the BIA tries to attract a new business the first questions asked are what is the population and where do people shop. "Unfortunately, we have to tell them that 90 per cent of the time local people shop out of town. That's the sad part, but I don't know how you communicate to people that if they don't support our businesses, we can't encourage new ones to come."

Holmes predicts the other main job of the BIA this year will be to continue improving the image of the downtown.

"We've done a great deal in the last five years. Our village police constable helped get rid of a lot of the hang-around crowd on the street corners. It is a very slow process though to bring back your downtown so that people want to stay and shop there. We want people who come to the olde Hide House to like what they see enough to have a walk around and check out the other stores."



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Acton Breakfast Club countdown

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
Students at Acton's Robert Little school will be fed a continental breakfast Friday morning by volunteers of the Dine and Dash Breakfast Club.

Club co-ordinator Janet Cullen said they want to let students and parents know about the program that begins serving breakfast to students on Monday, Jan. 18 at St.

Alban's Church.

"We will give the kids a covering letter and brochure to take home explaining who and what we are," Cullen said last Monday.

"We invite any child who needs breakfast to come by St. Alban's any school morning from 8 to 8:30. Although we expect a lot of students from Robert Little, everyone is welcome. This will be our pilot

project and if it works, we will do it in other parts of town."

Cullen expects to feed between 20 and 150 children a day. The need for the program was first identified by officials at the FoodShare food bank who noticed that a lot of their clients were children who were innocent victims of poverty.

The Breakfast Club will be run by a group of volunteers from local churches and service groups which calls itself the "Dream Team." Rotating crews of volunteers will prepare and serve the breakfasts, made with donated food.

Cullen said what they need now is money.

"We really need money and food. We have to buy thermometers for the fridges and I'm going to buy material to be made into tea towels," Cullen said. "Money would help us get off the ground and let us buy what we aren't given to stock the kitchen. We need cereals, eggs, bread and bacon and we need a milk supplier."

Cullen said they will try to get all the food they need from donations but they do have an arrangement to get food, if needed, from Acton Foodshare and the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto.

"We have had donations of equipment — we were given two microwaves, and people have offered to come in and make muffins, but we need more volunteers."

The Breakfast Club will begin serving on Monday, Jan. 18 and the official opening will be the following Monday.

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