

Cheese Biz



Duneland Business Initiative Group

Who Are We and What Do We Do?

Quite a few months back a small group of area retailers began meeting at the Duneland Chamber of Commerce to discuss how to promote Chesterton and the surrounding area; Porter, Beverly Shores, Burns Harbor, and Dune Acres.

This group formed quite simply by saying "lets meet". So the monthly meetings began and were held the second Wednesday of each month. In a few short months other retailers became involved, mostly by word of mouth. Some were Chamber members others were not, but all had the common goal of doing something good for the community and promoting the uniqueness and charm the area has.

Discussions were held regarding festivals, retailer events, how to keep "Chestertonians" shopping here, how to get others to shop here, holiday window painting, branding Chesterton, and so forth.

It was quickly noted that the

Duneland area is so very widespread ... not only do we have the surrounding area towns, but Chesterton is broken up into quadrants. We have downtown, Indiana Boundary, Coffee Creek, and all the way out to Furnessville. So our efforts of communication with the entire area is critical if we are to make an impact as a whole.

Next we discovered we had wonderful ideas but lacked enough time in the day to initiate them with all of us running our own businesses. Needless to say frustration amounted. We wanted to do so much with so little resources.

The group believed we needed more exposure to the outside area; Chicago, Michigan, Wisconsin, and the rest of Indiana. Many travelers stopped for gas here, ate at our fast food restaurants, passed our main 3 stoplights on highway 49 to head to



Center of Town
From Duneland.com

the Dunes, but did not see us as a destination to visit.

So we began a campaign to Brand Chesterton/Duneland area and requested the expertise of Griffin Marketing and the knowledge of Porter County Convention, Recreation and Visitors Commission (PCCRVC).

The group continues to meet the second Wednesday of each month and requests the input of other area businesses and residents to join in for the good of our wonderfully unique community.

Branding Proposal

You may ask ... What is branding and what can it do for us?

The following a part of proposal put together by Griffin Marking to help answer just that.

Purpose: *With its access to the Indiana Dunes National Lake-shore plus its small town charm,*

Chesterton—and the surrounding Duneland area—has a tremendous amount of potential to become a shopping and dining destination for day trips and longer visits by people from the Chicago area as well as the entire state of Indiana. In fact,

some 1.5 million visitors explore the Indiana Dunes and enjoy the beaches each year, and only a fraction of them venture to see what the community has to offer in terms of unique shops and restaurants.

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Business Initiative Purpose

- *Duneland business owners and residents meeting to share ideas*
- *Creating a commonness in goals for the community businesses*
- *Creating ideas and means of promoting the area and its businesses*
- *Campaigning to bring other businesses to the area*
- *Planning of special events and festivals*
- *Focusing on "Branding" Duneland*
- *Making Duneland a tourism destination*
- *... And so much more*

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Duneland Business Initiative Group

Branding (Continued)

By working to build and promote a “brand” for the community, we can have a dramatic financial impact on the retail businesses here. It is not a simple, one-shot tactic but rather a strategic and sustained effort that—yes—costs money and will take several years to gain traction.

The intricacies of branding go far beyond the mere creation of a theme and logo and include shaping a quote product that is appealing and valued by customers by consumers. Thus, our efforts will be not only to attract potential “customers” to the area but also recruit and

support the types of businesses that will help make this area unique and interesting.

From the December meeting it was discussed to have a special January 30th meeting to roll out the idea of branding to a larger group and invite others to attend.

At the January 30th meeting other avenues came into light from the PCCRVC (see next article) regarding branding. At the next meeting for the Business Initiative Group it will be discussed what direction will be taken next.

“Branding is more than a logo and theme ... it’s an experience” - Nate Griffin

January 30th—Information From PCCRVC

To kick off the meeting held at the Porter County Convention, Recreation & Visitor Commission, Lorelei Weimer spoke regarding updates from the tourism arena. The following is from her notes.

Tourism is about importing new cash to our communities. Tourism is the front door to traditional economic development. It is the quality of life and our area of uniqueness that attracts visitors and in turn that can lead to business attraction. Fifty percent of businesses that relocated to Arizona started out as tourists to that area.

There is an importance of creating a unique destination, which sets us apart from our competition and gives reasons for people to visit our area. Creating a unique destination is about destination development and developing a destination that truly reflects who we are and is something you cannot get in other communities. PCCRVC wants to be a catalyst to developing our unique destination. The following are a few key projects that will continue to move us forward on this front.

1. Ecology / Heritage Trail Development: Phase I contract is to be in February which will be to develop the trail and marketing materials. Phase II is to put in place an interpretive and directional signage program. Phase III is to implement interpretive programs that can be downloaded off our website on MP3 players and IPODs. Phase

IV is to develop new assets along the trail and to determine green companies that could relocate their businesses here.

2. Community Assessment: National expert Roger Brooks will do a community assessment on our cities and towns in the Porter County area plus eleven other counties in the area. The purpose is to take a photographic look at our individual communities through the eyes of our visitors. What we will learn are first impressions, lasting impressions, do we have a good business mix – especially in downtown, signage, local attitude, curb appeal and beautification, ease of getting around, things to see and do, how we stack up against our competitors and finally branding.

The community assessment is to help businesses get people through their doors and close the sale. Basically the number one activity for travelers is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian friendly area. This makes the downtowns of our communities an important part of the tourism mix and these visitors will stay overnight if there is something to do after 6:00 pm.

The heart and soul of every community, be-



Indiana Dunes ... A Place to Relax

sides its people, is its downtown. In the downtown area you want to create a gathering place for residents. Where residents go, the visitors follow. We must remember that 70% of consumer spending takes place after 6 pm. One of the formulas to a successful downtown is not only the business mix in the downtown area, but the number of businesses

open after 6 pm.

During the Roger Brooks' assessment every short coming that is brought to our attention will be given an inexpensive way to fix the problem. He will create action plans which are itemized recommendations with descriptions and what the costs are, so communities can start immediately if they choose. Some examples would include unique crosswalks, public restrooms – the value, not having 2 hour parking, building signage, etc.

Roger's team is to be in Indiana in the months of June and July doing the actual assessments, which will include hundreds of photos. He will then come back in September to do two workshops. The workshops will be divided by communities. Those that attend the workshops should be public officials, department heads, chambers, economic (continued)

Duneland Business Initiative Group

January 30th—Info From PCCRVC (continued)

development organizations, businesses (retail, lodging, dining, etc.).

Lorelei went on to explain about books that will be available for the community entitled "Your Town a Destination". She also noted that the next steps after the September meeting will be branding, marketing and action plans. She stated that with our Business Initiative Group, we

will help to be a driving force in the team effort of this program and its implementation.

Her final comment was that we need to create this vision of Chesterton/Duneland ... create a focus and a direction in getting it done.



Jan. 30th- Banners

Bonnie Trout stated that The Chamber is working with a sign company to create Duneland banners which will be 6' x 2.5' in size and placed on utility poles, with smaller signs on the lamp posts.

Area businesses (chamber and non chamber members) can sponsor these signs for one year with their information on the sign. After the year is up it is hopeful that we have our new branding logo that will go on the sign and the new sponsorship year will start again.

The goal is to keep the traffic flow following the banners. It is anticipated that the project will roll out in the next 3-6 months; however businesses will be approached for sponsorship within the next few weeks. The town is waiting for approved variances for the signs on the utility poles.

Further updates will follow regarding price and the look of the banners.

January 30th Meeting—Open Forum

Discussions continued in an open forum manner bringing up many points, concerns and questions.

In response to the PCCRVC's presentation regarding evening shoppers; a comment was made that many stores in the area close at 6 pm and later hours would be helpful. One restaurateur stated that diners finish their meal and want to know where to go to next. Difficult question to answer if they want to shop.

Another comment regarding later retail hours was made along with the possibility of keeping store front window lights on so people can at least window shop and come back later. However then you are taking that chance – will they really come back?

One restaurateur had concerns regarding that sign ordinances that do not allow for a sign on Indiana Boundary to point back to his restaurant behind the old Jewel building. He also continued on stating that he cannot take advantage of travelers from highway 49, because they do not know that the restaurant is there. It was pointed out in response that the purpose of the ordinances is to maintain a cleaner uncluttered look of the area. However it is understood that our short coming is how to get the attention of the travelers that stop for gas and food, and direct them to the other businesses in and around town.

Other comments were brought up regarding businesses and the snow removal in front of the stores. During snow fall some sidewalks will be clear and others will remain snow covered. Why not create a buddy system and help each other out?

It was noted that the downtown area looks

Dingy and old. Many storefronts have trash on the sidewalks, clutter in front of the stores and it just does not look inviting. And for a few retailers the trash and clutter issues has existed for sometime. In response it was noted that some retailers do not own their building so to put money into it does not make sense. Or those that do own are having a difficult time especially in this struggling market. It was also noted that some retailers just do not see what the general public sees when passing their shops. In response: There is a store front loan available to business owners that do fix up their store fronts providing lower interest rates. Peer pressure can help in assisting retailers to clean up. A clean up and beautification day can be instituted to help the downtown area; potted flowers, paint dingy wood, clean up trash, help de-clutter, etc.

Another comment was made that the downtown area needs a complete face-lift, not just clean-up. There are grants available regarding this sort of an undertaking. However a point person will need to be designated to research these funds and town official involvement will be needed to assist with this undertaking.

A question arose in concern of the town's involvement with the Business Initiative Group and are they on board with what we are trying to do. In response: the town is aware of the group from the chamber and Steve Yagelski's involvement as a member of the group.

An area resident commented that we should have more family events. This was in response to our loss of the Oz Festival. Presently the European Market is one of the major

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Next Meeting ...

**Wednesday, February
13th, 7 pm
At Chamber of Commerce Building**

Duneland Business Initiative Group

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Our group is getting larger ... let's keep the communication going.

Email me if others would like to be on the emailing list
info@nwihb.com



Open Forum—(Continued)

events that keep people coming to the area.

As a mom, this resident enjoys the little things to do with the kids. Simple things such as paper boat races, kite flying, etc. just the inexpensive events that have an impact.

Another comment on this track was wellness and recreation with the Coffee Creek Trails. Combine wellness, recreation and music for an event. We do have music in the park and the Friday Night Movie Night; we just need/crave more.

Our next meeting will be held at the Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday, February 13th

and 7 pm (new time). As you can see there are many opportunities for people to get involved and help implement action. All area businesses are welcome and all residents of Chesterton/Duneland are welcome.

“Editors” Note

My name is Machelle Blount, I created this newsletter in hopes of keeping people informed. I am not a writer or editor, so if my grammar or spelling is incorrect I apologize. If I left something out or reported incorrectly, I again apologize. My hope is to capture the energy of discussions and actions, and then have that be contagious to get more on board, more involved. I welcome comments, questions and concerns and will bring them up to the group, if you are unable to attend, on your behalf if you would like. Please feel free to email me at info@nwihb.com or stop by my business at 211 Broadway.