

BIA Chair report – 2021 AGM

This is a recap of the year that was 2020 from the BIA Board. It was only about a month after the last AGM that the Covid related lockdowns started. With the lockdowns and uncertainty of what was open and what wasn't we initiated a spreadsheet that could be viewed online where businesses could list their status' and protocols. With the more recent lockdowns, we realized the same process was too cumbersome a procedure to continue and encouraged businesses to post to the Wingham Community Connectors facebook page which has seen quite a bit of activity.

Through the initial lockdowns and restrictions, the BIA distributed 50 hand sanitizer stands at no charge, 30 plexiglass shields, 75 floor dots and door signs to approximately 50 businesses. Some of these initiatives were in turn copied by other Huron County BIAs. We also assisted businesses with getting in touch with Huron Community Futures for Covid relief and had the largest number of applicants who were able to take part.

Although a Huron County Economic Development initiative we promoted the Digital Main Street program that returned in 2020. 11 businesses received grants of up to \$2,500 to enhance their online business presence.

Once the spring lockdown was lifted Alecia Dietner of The 2 Step and Bill George of Naturally Bongins spearheaded a retail promotion called Wingham – Back in Business. This was very successful and helped keep more shopping local.

Covid forced the cancellation of the NH Fire Dept annual July 1 fireworks display and the Lions Club Santa Claus parade, both which the BIA assists by covering the insurance costs. The savings to the BIA was diverted late in the year to make more BIA Community Cash available, again assisting local businesses as the coupons can only be redeemed in Wingham.

Covid also forced a change to the Festival of Lanterns, but in the long run this may have been a benefit to the format of the event going forward as it encompassed more of the business core. Josephine St looked great for the Christmas season with the lights in Cruikshank Park (sponsored by the BIA) and the arrival of the gnomes along several business fronts. Thanks to Julie Miller of House of Bloom for the idea and to Lisa Hearnden for spearheading the work groups to produce and place the gnomes. The positive response was tremendous.

At this point of 2021 we're getting through another lockdown, but hopefully there's a light coming. On the positive side we have seen several new businesses opened in 2020. Those will be named later when the BIA Awards are announced. They range from single owner small businesses to world wide franchises. I know NH Council has several initiatives they're working on and regardless of Covid, the future of the Wingham business community is very bright.