

Renew North Wellington fills vacant storefronts with businesses

BY OLIVIA RUTT

WELLINGTON COUNTY – Over a year into the program, Renew Northern Wellington has helped put five new businesses into vacant downtown storefronts in the three northern municipalities.

Minto, Mapleton and Wellington North have collaborated to create this revitalization program to fill empty stores and help people succeed in their business endeavour.

“We were just taking a look at the vacancy in the downtowns and how we can generate some interest,” said April Marshall, Renew’s Wellington North project coordinator.

Marshall explained the Renew program started in Australia, but New Tecumseh was the first area to use it in Ontario. Wellington North was able to get an Ontario Trillium grant for over \$66,000 to bring the program to Wellington County, starting the non-profit corporation Renew Northern Wellington Arts and Business Association.

The program matches retail space with new businesses that need a hand getting started by offering short and medium term uses.

“It is not set up to manage long-term uses, own properties, or permanently develop sites but to generate activity in them until a future long-term activity occurs,” states the website.

“Ultimately it would be great if they did find that long term lease in that building that they got through Renew, but ... we find success in them just staying (in the community),” Marshall explained.

Participants get a downtown location without paying rent on a 30-day rolling contract. However, there is a participation fee, which has been updated as of June 28. Membership fees are \$100 for the first month and increase based on the size of the property. For loca-

tions less than 1,000 square feet, the monthly fee increases by \$50 a month and locations greater than 1,000 square feet, it increased by \$75 a month.

“The whole idea with the program is to

“
The whole idea with the program is to help entrepreneurs start out, but we don’t see it as a program that they continue on forever ...

DALE SMALL,
PROJECT COORDINATOR
RENEW WELLINGTON NORTH

help entrepreneurs start out, but we don’t see it as a program that they continue on forever, and so by the fees going up, the intent is ... within six to nine months, they’re pretty much up to the point of paying commercial rental rates, and that’s the time that they need to decide,” said Dale Small, Renew’s Wellington North project coordinator.

Small explained the fees are used for “marketing, promotion, getting new building owners on side, all of that sort of stuff.”

This relief from rent allows entrepreneurs to start their business without start-up costs

relating to rent.

“It just gives you the time to go through those hurdles ... and figure out what’s working and what isn’t,” said Marshall.

Business owners also have to pay the utilities and require insurance.

Interested start-ups need to fill out an application and provide a resume and a portfolio to be considered for the program. They are then assessed, invited to view the space and eventually will have an in-person interview with the proposal committee.

Property owners can make their property available to the program for a fixed term, such as until a future development, or on a rolling basis until a commercial tenant is found.

“They’re essentially donating the space that would be sitting empty anyways,” said Marshall.

“They get the cosmetic upgrades that the business is going to do, the business is open for viewing all day so it essentially stages it for other prospects and it has someone in the building so it generates activity.”

Since the launch in May 2015, five businesses have used the program.

“I think with everything, it takes time to build it and, we’re committed to doing that. We’re very pleased with the recent success we’ve had, and we’re still encouraging our building owners to have some interest and participate with us,” said Marshall.

DINKELMANN GRAPPLING ARTS

The first business opened under the program was Dinkelmann Grappling Arts in Palmerston on Jan. 14. Started by Nathan Dinkelmann, the club specializes in freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling as well as Jiu-

Jitsu programs for any age.

Dinkelmann is considered the first graduate of the program, and he is now moving into the larger space of the former Palmer Tavern down the street from his current location.

“The plan was to try and stay on the program for at least a year and when it got to the point where my clientele was full, and I had demand for a bigger (space) ... I just had to make the move,” he said.

Dinkelmann said he started looking for resources to start up his business when he found the Renew program. He added that he has found all of the resources very helpful.

“It’s what I wanted to do my whole life so the fact that I actually get to expand and have a lot of people backing me behind it, it lets me know I’m doing the right thing,” he said.

THE GIFT ARTIVITY CENTER

Rene Ariens opened the Gift Artivity Center in Mount Forest on Jan. 16. The centre is a gallery and offers space to local artists. It hosts workshops and provides a venue for other arts such as poetry and music, all without charging fees.

Ariens also offers services for artwork such as framing, digital proofs, prints, restoration, mat cutting and other displays.

RIGHT AT HOME CANADA

Right at Home Canada provides in-home care for seniors and adults with disabilities. They provide medical and non-medical assistance for those who need assistance in maintaining their independence.

Right at Home Canada is a national company offering supportive care and is run locally by president and owner Laura Greenway-Balnar, who also runs a Guelph location. The business opened July 21 in Mount Forest.

“

I’m doing what I love and I had this amazing opportunity.

TINA GRANT
TINA’S SUGAR SHOPPE

”

TINA’S SUGAR SHOPPE

Tina’s Sugar Shoppe opened on July 21 in Mount Forest. It features an array of gourmet baked goods and custom specialty cakes and cookies. Most of the cookies are decorated with little faces and colourful icing.

Tina Grant started her business at home but moved into the storefront through the Renew program.

“I didn’t do it full-time from my home either, I had a full-time job, so I was just doing this as a little part-time thing to make extra money and now all of a sudden it’s a full-time

thing,” she said.

Marshall had approached Grant to let her know about the open space in the Mount Forest plaza, and Grant said she jumped on the opportunity.

Since opening the store, it has been non-stop for Grant, but she added, “I’m doing what I love and I had this amazing opportunity.”

T&J STUDIOS PHOTOGRAPHY

The fifth business to open under the Renew Program is T&J Studios Photography located in Palmerston.

The Studio, which opened on Aug. 4, is an established photography business that specializes in weddings, family and children portraits. Amanda Belec-Newton, the owner, also offers graphic design services and rentals for weddings and events.

For more information on the Renew Northern Wellington program visit www.renewnorthernwellington.ca.

BL

BELOW: RIGHT AT HOME CANADA provides in-home medical and non-medical care for seniors and adults with disabilities. From left: Connie Good, Laura Greenway-Balnar, Lynda Prior, Diane Morgan, Mount Forest Chamber of Commerce president David Ford, Katie Dawitt, Lennox, Beth Davidson and Perth-Wellington MP John Nater.

Photo by Faye Craig

