



Downtown Revitalization

Story and Photos by Patrick Callbeck

Two teenagers skateboard through the fog on Front St. in downtown Belleville in the middle of the night. There are very few establishments downtown that stay open past 6 p.m. causing the city to become desolate after workers go home.



Sarah Tummon, stands outside of the Belleville Downtown Improvement Area office on Front St. The BDIA aims to provide business promotion and improvement functions for business owners in downtown Belleville.

The sun was setting on Front Street as a large crowd started to gather on the warm but brisk November evening. Hundreds of people flooded the area between Dundas and Station streets trying to get a glimpse of different floats in Belleville's Santa Claus parade. The parade marks one of the busiest days in downtown Belleville, but just like every other day of the year, everyone's backs were turned to the businesses in the downtown core.

Changing demographics, evolving business practices and economic pressures are affecting how and where people live and work in small towns across the country. Commerce is moving away from the downtown core to uptown malls and big box stores and people are moving away from downtown to find more affordable housing. Belleville is a textbook example of this.

Greenley's Book Store closing is part of a larger snowballing issue in downtown Belleville. Since storefront operations downtown rely heavily on walk-in customers to survive, the city needs to attract people downtown in the first place. But if the downtown core can't provide what people are looking for, then it can be difficult for businesses to get the foot-traffic they need to survive.

"We are closing for personal reasons, but mostly because of the economy. Running a small business is great, but you also pay yourself last and to keep going, you do need a paycheck," said Tammy Grieve, owner and operator of Greenley's. The store, which had been around for over 30 years, has recently closed.

"Greenley's closing is a sign of the times, with the online books and everything. But many areas, no matter here or Europe, have the bookshops around and they can be supported if you have people, the foot-traffic to support them, which is always a problem," said Paul Dinkel, owner of Paulo's Italian Trattoria and Dinkel's Restaurant.

Downtown Belleville is definitely not in dire straits. There are many businesses that are thriving and there are different events held downtown that draw hundreds of spectators every year. However, there are also many vacant storefronts and a noticeable lack of nightlife. To prevent things from getting worse, there are various groups in the city working hard to reinvigorate the downtown core.

The Belleville Downtown Improvement Area (BDIA) is one group working to rejuvenate downtown Belleville. Their mandate is to promote both businesses and events in

the downtown core. The BDIA's newly hired executive director Sarah Tummon is optimistic about downtown Belleville's future.

"We have some infrastructure programs coming up in 2013. We are really trying to beautify the streetscape and after that it will attract more business. We strongly believe that the downtown core is the heart of the city," said Tummon.

For many people, downtown is important not only for the businesses that are there, but also for its cultural significance. Downtown Belleville has been an important area for business, politics and life for the city since the late 1700s. Without a proper development and restoration plan, Belleville is at risk of losing its heritage.

Downtown Belleville has so many qualities that could make it stand out from the rest of the cities in Ontario. It is situated beside the Moira River and adjacent to the Bay of Quinte. It has historic properties dating back to the early 1800s and most importantly, it has people who care about it and want to see it prosper. Hopefully, with time and some help from the city, downtown Belleville will see its sidewalks filled with shoppers instead of empty storefronts.



Tammy Grieve, the owner and operator of Greenley's Bookstore, shuts off the lights as she prepares to leave the store for the night. Greenley's Bookstore is closing after more than 30 years in operation.



Located on Front St is a mural painted by local artist Kim Taylor used to fill a vacant spot on the streetscape. It's part of the city's ongoing efforts to improve Belleville's downtown.



Jerry's Market closed in October, 2011. The store suffered from numerous armed robberies in the years that it was open. Nothing has moved into the vacant building at 391 Front St.



Two workers use a crane-lift to bring siding up to the top of a heritage building in downtown Belleville.



Pam Sylvan is part of Friends of Downtown, a grassroots organization designed to bring life back to the downtown core. She is optimistic about the future of the city and often writes about it in her column in the Belleville Intelligencer.



Paul Dinkel shows off the dining room in his French restaurant Dinkel's. The dining room, which is a new edition to the original heritage building, was designed to fit with the characteristics of the adjoining heritage building.