



Town of Newmarket
395 Mulock Drive P.O. Box 328,
Newmarket, Ontario, L3Y 4X7

Email: info@newmarket.ca | Website: newmarket.ca | Phone: 905-895-5193

Random Acts of Downtown Shopping Impact Information Report to Council

Report Number: INFO-2022-24

Department(s): Economic Development

Author(s): Elizabeth Hawkins

Distribution Date: September 9, 2022

In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Executive Summary

Between May 1 – June 15, 2022 the Town of Newmarket ran the Random Acts of Downtown Shopping (RADS) program to redistribute \$20 000 in funds received through a significant filming project in the Main Street BIA District. Forty-five businesses participated in the program and over 500 gift vouchers were distributed in the community. Overall, the project met objectives and was a successful way to engage businesses and residents in a targeted campaign in the downtown core. Feedback from businesses will help to shape future programs aimed at increasing local spending and supporting businesses.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the Random Acts of Downtown Shopping program, which took place in the Main Street BIA District from May 1 – June 15, 2022.

Background

In March 2022, the Town announced that a significant filming project would be taking place in the Main Street Business Improvement Area (BIA) March 21 to April 3. The two week filming expected to bring \$200 000 in economic impact to the Town of Newmarket including through rental and permit fees to the Town, accommodations at local hotels and several hundred cast and crew shopping and dining in Newmarket. As part of the effort to balance the community impact of the filming and the potential disruptions in the downtown core, the Town initiated the Random Acts of Downtown shopping program; an investment of \$20 000 in rewards and prizing was created to drive spending in the Main Street BIA.

Discussion

Goals/Objectives

In May 2022, the Town launched the Random Acts of Downtown Shopping program with the following objectives in mind:

- Re-invest \$20,000 of film revenues into the Main Street BIA, in a time sensitive manner
- Remind residents of the joy of visiting downtown and re-invigorate the community vibrancy that is key to this area
- Make it easy for businesses and the public to participate in the program
- Spread joy!

Program Specifics

Town staff developed a program with these goals in mind. Early on in the planning process it became clear that a BIA wide gift voucher was required in order create a consistent experience for residents and to ensure that businesses without a formal gift card program could participate. The gift vouchers also allowed for a time-limited redemption period to ensure film fees were re-invested as quickly as possible into the downtown and to encourage residents to redeem vouchers. The program consisted of a RADS branded gift voucher redeemable only at the business listed on the voucher with a specific amount ranging from \$10-\$150 depending on the amount needed to make a purchase from the business.

Professional services and businesses with very niche products received coffee/tea/bakery gift vouchers for Main Street businesses to distribute in lieu of gift vouchers for their services. These businesses were asked to share the vouchers with clients, staff and guests to encourage these groups to visit Main Street businesses and enjoy the vibrancy of the Main Street BIA.

Town staff reached out to BIA members seeking their participation in the RADS program. In total, 45 businesses participated and 562 gift vouchers totaling \$20 000 were distributed in the community in the following ways:

- Random draw for participants in 2022 Spring Recreational programming –winners were notified and sent vouchers by mail
- Social media draw – residents who participated in online discussions were entered into a random draw for a voucher
- Community Clean-up -community clean up locations in each ward received 10 gift vouchers to distribute randomly to participants
- By-laws in the community –distributed to residents on the trails and in the community by by-law officers
- Chief Positivity Officer and Assistant Positivity Ambassadors (Jamie Boyle and colleagues) distributing at the farmers market, on trails and more
- Coffee and Tea cards to professional services and niche industries on Main Street to offer clients and staff to explore Main Street

Results

The Random Acts of Downtown Shopping program wrapped up on June 15, 2022. During the program, we collected feedback in various ways.

Resident Feedback

We asked residents to voluntarily fill out a survey to tell us how they enjoyed the program. Only a handful of residents shared their thoughts so results are anecdotal, however they further bolster other anecdotal feedback we received on the program from our CPO, bylaws and comments on social media.

The resident survey results are as follows:

- 100% of residents completing the survey said that the Random Acts of Downtown shopping program brought them joy!
- On average, one voucher dollar redeemed by survey participants generated \$1.26 in spending; i.e., residents spent 26% more than the voucher amount on average.
- Half of the residents completing the survey redeemed a voucher at a Main Street business they had never visited before

Staff distributing the gift vouchers reported very positive experiences with residents who were surprised and very grateful to receive a gift simply for enjoying the community amenities and spending time outdoors.

Staff monitored social media for comments and feedback on the program, which were overwhelmingly positive and excited. Below is a sample social media post from the community.

\$25

Newmarket

Random Acts of Downtown Shopping

You are the lucky recipient of a Random Act of Downtown Shopping gift voucher, courtesy of the Town of Newmarket, for

Nutmeg Bakeshop
256 Main St. S.

This program is fully funded by revenues from the filming of a recent televisic production in Newmarket. This is a thank you to the businesses that were affi by the filming, we appreciate their support and commitment to building an a downtown district. Please use this gift voucher to rediscover the positive ene vibrancy of our award-winning Main Street. Inspired by Random Acts of Kind we hope this inspires you to help spread some sunshine and positivity by usir voucher in support of our downtown business community or passing it along friend, family member, colleague or stranger to brighten someone else's day

Please enjoy as soon as possible! Expires June 15, 2022

lizholtby What a nice surprise when I was walking on the #tomtaylortrail with Chloe this afternoon, and a Town of Newmarket employee handed me a \$25 coupon to use at @nutmegbakeshop. This is part of their Random Acts of Downtown Shopping campaign. I LOVE @nutmegbakeshop. What a wonderful surprise. #newmarket #tomtaylortrail #randomactsofdowntownshopping #rightplacerrighttime

Edited · 4w

margauxmamma Love this idea! 4w 1 like Reply

marymitchell9737 I'm volunteering to help you eat whatever you get at Nutmeg Bakeshop 😊 4w 1 like Reply

letsmoveandcookingadventures Love it 🍷 4w 1 like Reply

dianecolautti That's so nice, enjoy. 4w 1 like Reply

Business Feedback

Following the wrap of the program, staff requested businesses provide feedback via a survey on their experiences in the program. Twenty businesses responded with the majority of these businesses being retailers. Professional services were asked questions to reflect the amended program.

Professional Services Results

The Professional services businesses that completed the survey were all very happy with the program. They each said “10”, when asked on a scale of 1-10 (with ten being most likely) how likely they were to suggest the program to a friend or client and “Completely agree” when asked to evaluate it the program “Made my customers and staff very happy.”

Professional services feedback:

“The program worked well. A chance to visit shops, always spent more than the value of the gift certificate. Would highly recommend this program”

“Thought it was great that I could pass on the coupons for businesses on the street to help them and make clients and staff appreciate/try new places in our area.”

Gift Voucher Business Results

The perceived impact on businesses who participated in gift voucher distribution was much more varied than the results from the professional services group.

Ease of Administration

The question with the most consistency in experience across businesses was “On a scale of 1-10 the Random Acts of Downtown Shopping program was easy to administer for my team.” Seventy-six percent (76%) of participating businesses said that they completely agreed or somewhat agreed. The remaining respondents indicated they “neither agree or disagree.”

Some businesses shared ideas for making future programs easier to administer including adding barcodes to the vouchers. One business also shared that the program required them to create a new code in their point of sale system.

Economic Impact

The business survey sought to understand how many gift vouchers were redeemed in each location. The redemption frequency was different across all types of businesses. Those businesses who had fewer redemptions also indicated less satisfaction with the program in later questions.

How many gift vouchers were redeemed?	
Unsure	15.38%
0-25% redeemed	15.38%
26-50% redeemed	30.77%
51-75% redeemed	15.38%
76-100%	23.08%

- Spreading joy metric: 53.8% of survey respondents completely agreed and 23% somewhat agreed that the program “made my customers very happy.” 23% neither agreed or disagreed with the statement
- Economic impact metric: 46% of survey respondents completely agreed and 15.4% somewhat agreed that the program “brought in additional revenue.” 15% neither agreed or disagreed, 7.7% somewhat disagreed and 15% completely disagreed that the program “brought in additional revenue”
- Economic impact metric: 53% of survey respondents completely agreed and 23.08% somewhat agreed that the program was “good for business overall.” 7.7% neither agreed or disagreed and 15.4% completely disagreed.

Businesses shared that they felt that changing the denomination amount for their particular location and extending the redemption time might have increased the economic impact on their business and their overall satisfaction with the program.

Businesses also shared the following feedback (edited for brevity/anonymity/grammar):

“Great program overall - the people who brought in the gift certificates were very happy to have them and use them”

“Great program - Just didn't work for us. No one came with a gift certificate. It may be that they felt they would need to spend too much.”

“The random acts gift certificates might have brought in more new customers had the dollar value been less ... There was additional programming of our pos...Overall, we really are grateful to be a part of the downtown business network and working with the Town... Looking forward to future endeavors”

“If we could use a barcode for future promotions, we could capture data more easily i.e.: total sale amount and user information. It can be difficult to manually capture information if there is a line-up of customers. Thank you very much for creating this program for local businesses. It is greatly appreciated.”

“All of our redemptions occurred from June 10-15. If the program had been a little longer, would we have seen more redemptions? I'm not sure, but it's food for thought. We only had two new people, the others were our regulars who either won it or received a voucher from a friend who wasn't planning to use it. But it made them happy.”

Conclusion

Overall, the Random Acts of Downtown Shopping program met its' objectives and the survey information collected will help to shape future business engagement programs in the community.

- The Town was able to quickly re-invest \$20,000 in film revenue in the downtown and many stores saw increased spending over and above the gift voucher amount.
- Professional services, residents, staff distributing gift vouchers and gift voucher distributing businesses agreed that the program made people very happy and brought them downtown to experience the vibrancy of the BIA district.

- Businesses surveyed agreed that it was easy for businesses and the public to participate in the program

The business survey provided excellent feedback on the program and opportunities to adjust for future business engagements.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This program supports the goals of the Council Strategic Priority of Economic Development and Job Creation and the Newmarket Economic Development Strategy pillars of “Community Vibrancy” and “Building an Entrepreneurial Eco-system” by supporting local businesses and promoting the downtown core.

Consultation

In the creation of this report, Regulatory Services and Customer Service were consulted. Businesses and residents participating in the program were surveyed about their experiences with the program.

Human Resource Considerations

None.

Budget Impact

The funding for this program came primarily from the revenues from the significant filming in the downtown. Additional costs were funded out of the Economic Development operational budget.

Attachments

None.

Contact

Elizabeth Hawkins, Business Development Specialist ehawkins@newmarket.ca

Approval

Chris Kallio, Economic Development Officer, Office of the CAO

Ian McDougall, Chief Administrative Officer, Office of the CAO