

## BIA's focus is on "we not me"

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Ratified 18 short months ago, the Baby Point Gates Business Improvement Area (BIA) is only just beginning to see the fruits of its labour.

Becoming a BIA, says its executive, has been a somewhat long and arduous process - yet immensely rewarding.

"We're starting to draw more attention to the area," said vice-chair Dennis Maslo of the association of commercial property owners and tenants within the boundaries of Annette Street east to Windermere Avenue, Jane Street north to Monteye Avenue and south to Lessard Avenue and west to Baby Point Road. "We've been at this 18 months and things are starting to hit the ground running now."

The Baby Point Gates BIA derives its name from the historic stone gates at the Jane and Annette streets intersection, which not coincidentally celebrated its centennial anniversary in 2011 during the BIA's inaugural year.

Since the BIA's inception, the executive and its board members have focused on beautification for the most part and housekeeping duties, such as creating a website, branding, erecting banners and commissioning the painting of three murals with more expected.

"We haven't turned the corner yet, but we can see momentum building - that's been my experience," Maslo said during a conversation with BIA chair Darryl Kaplan and treasurer Rada Belomarkovic.

Overall, the area has seen a significant change since last year.

"I see more people on the street," said Belomarkovic.

It's too soon for the organization to do much more than contemplate the types of events it would like to host, but there is no shortage of ideas, said Kaplan - "we've got to set our budget for next year."

Baby Point Gates sets itself apart from other BIAs in adjacent neighbourhoods because virtually every one of its businesses are local and owner/operated, pointed out Kaplan. It doesn't hurt that the area is still an affordable option.

"'For Lease' signs don't sit anymore," he said. "We have a commercial strip that works really well. We'd like to make it bigger and better for retail and residents. Now we have a vehicle to make the changes we've wanted for so many years."



**BIA's focus is on "we not me".** Baby Point Gates BIA Chair Darryl Kaplan, Vice-chair Dennis Maslo and Treasurer Rada Belomarkovic stand in front of the historic gates at Annette and Jane streets, the BIA's namesake. The 18-month old BIA is embarking on a revitalization project to see the gates restored to their former glory.  
*Staff photo/LISA RAINFORD*

The three colleagues attribute the BIA's initial success to perseverance and common goals, a sentiment that is echoed by BIAs in surrounding neighbourhoods.

By contrast, the Bloor West Village BIA, at 42 years of age and the first-ever in Canada, is a well-oiled machine, yet its philosophy has remained constant over the decades.

"It's what's best for the businesses and the residents. You've got to be really respectful of everyone's ideas," said chair Paula McInerney, owner of McLellan's Jewellers. "Sure, we have our disagreements, but it's about 'we' not 'me'."

In the late 1960s, business in west Toronto was dire. There were vacant storefronts on every block of Bloor Street West from Jane Street to Runnymede Road. Shoppers, who had previously relied on the Bloor streetcar had disappeared underground on the newly constructed Bloor subway line while shopping malls were drawing crowds away from little mom and pop shops.

In 2010, Bill Whiteacre, co-founder of the Bloor West BIA told *The Villager* he was surprised at the inspiration others found in the creation of their organization.

"Things were rather depressed. Forty years ago, when I was founder of Bloor West Village (BIA), we wanted to solve our own problems. We didn't realize it'd go viral. Everyone wanted to emulate us," he said.

Bloor West Village is one of firsts; not only was it the first formed BIA in the country, but it was the first in Toronto to install solar lighting on all its mature trees.

"We're charging ahead with stronger solar panels. The trees will be ever more bright," said McInerney of the ongoing project.

The ever-popular annual Bloor West Village Street Festival returns Saturday, July 14, this year with even more activities for families, especially children. Businesses along the retail strip, which stretches along Bloor Street West east to Glendonwynne Road and South Kingsway to the west, are gearing up for the annual sidewalk sale Thursday, June 21 to Saturday, June 23.

"We're in good shape," said McInerney. "All the heavy lifting is done."

About half the age of the Bloor West Village BIA, Bloor by the Park was established in 1987 and prides itself on its "peaceful" and "relaxed" atmosphere.

"We're not a BIA like Bloor West Village or Roncesvalles Village - we don't have the size or the number of stores," said chair Ed Guca.

Bloor by the Park stretches along Bloor Street West from Keele Street to Roncesvalles Avenue.

"We have a few very interesting and unique shops, services, restaurants and pubs that are a treasure to find."

A BIA's mandate extends beyond beautification. Its role reaches further than simply tax reduction, said Helder Ramos, co-ordinator of the Dundas West BIA, which stretches along Dundas West from the CNR tracks west of Lansdowne Avenue to the east corner of Rusholme Road and Dundas West.

"You have to look at who your surrounding community is. You have to reach out to the community, especially if you're just starting out," he said.

This is certainly the Junction BIA's philosophy, according to chair Jim Roche.

"We want to work with other organizations like the Junction Residents Association to help with initiatives of mutual interest like rejuvenating the Keele and Dundas intersection," he said.

Only eight blocks long and boasting 200 businesses, the Junction BIA has a new executive director, Kristina Skindelyte, who will oversee her first major event in her new role, 'The Junction Summer Solstice Festival' on Saturday, June 23.

"We'll see how well the theme resonates," she said of the event that will celebrate the longest day of the year.

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