



SPBPA Helps Make Downtown

Since its founding in August of 1994, the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association (SPBPA) has been dedicated to maintaining the vitality of the township's business district and the overall community.

The Downtown Business Alliance, a township-appointed committee chaired by Michael Locascio and John Ferrara, had paved the way for creation of the SPBPA by requesting that an attempt be made to form a business group.

At that time, there wasn't an active Chamber of Commerce or other business group in Scotch Plains. Ray Pardon, a member of the downtown business committee who had opened Nuts N' Plenty in May of 1994, volunteered to try and form a business Association.

Begun with approximately nine members, the SPBPA, of which Mr. Pardon is President, now has about 190 members. It was formally set up as a non-profit corporation in the spring of 1995, and operates as such today with an 11-member board of directors and several committees.

The goals of the SPBPA are to improve communication throughout the business community; solicit and represent the views and opinions of its membership on relevant issues; create referral opportunities for its members through networking meetings and low cost promotions; create awareness of the Towne Centre, offer support to local business men and women, and work with government and other community groups to make Scotch Plains a better place to live and work.

Since its inception four years ago, the SPBPA has raised, through dues, contributions and special events, more than \$50,000 which has been reinvested in the community.

A monthly newsletter is distributed to all members, a significant number of non-members and township officials. The newsletter serves as a communication vehicle to keep individuals informed about happenings in town, according to Mr. Pardon.

In many instances, he revealed, it has been used by township departments, schools and other organizations to get a particular message out to the Scotch Plains business community.

The SPBPA regularly submits press releases to local newspapers on activities which are planned within the association and the township on a regular basis, to help

keep Scotch Plains in the news as an active community.

In the fall of 1994, the SPBPA re-instituted the township's annual Halloween Window Painting Contest, an activity which had been absent from the community for over 20 years. It has since become a favorite seasonal event, attracting nearly 100 middle school students each of the past four years.

Through a partnership with the Scotch Plains Recreation Commission, the SPBPA has expanded the annual Scotch Plains Day/StreetFest celebration by providing entertainment for adults and children; holding sidewalk sales, and donating approximately \$400 worth of T-shirts which are given to participants in the USATF Certified 5-mile road race through the township.

The SPBPA also pays for all publicity for the event with respect to flyers, banners and other promotional materials.

The group requested that the township's annual Christmas Tree lighting be moved from 6 p.m. on a Thursday evening to Sunday afternoon so that more families could take part in the event. The SPBPA now sponsors hay rides on this day as well.

Many of its members volunteer their time to dress as elves and Mrs. Claus for the holiday festivities, and an SPBPA volunteer has also played Santa for the past three years. In addition, the SPBPA sponsors a Christmas tree decorating contest for local scout troops, and a store window display contest judged by members of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School DECA, an association of marketing students.

The SPBPA also requested that the annual Easter Egg Hunt be moved to the Village Green from Brookside Park, which has been done for the past three years.

Working with the Recreation Department and the Junior Woman's Club the association has added egg decorating, games and prizes to the annual event. Again, the flyers for the event are designed and paid for by the SPBPA to help promote the event.

In 1997, working with DECA, the SPBPA created a first-of-its kind Town Directory which was produced and mailed to every residence and business in the township. Although advertising covered some of the expense, the SPBPA contributed over \$9,000 to have the directory completed and fully distributed. The Scotch Plains-Fanwood DECA chapter won first place in their national competition for the directory.

In 1996, the SPBPA paid for and had installed over 65 flower planters throughout the downtown area at a cost of \$1,500. Each spring and fall since then, the association has maintained the planters with new flowers at a cost of approximately \$2,000.

Last fall, the cost of this was shared with the township from a donation made by

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