

Merchants organizing first township-wide business association in 15 years

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BEESLEY'S POINT – Local merchants and business owners were set to vote today, Thursday, Jan. 14 at 5 p.m. at the Tuckahoe Inn on whether to create a new Upper Township Business Association dedicated to promoting local businesses.

The entire township hasn't had a business association or chamber of commerce for 15 years, according to Michael Hagan, owner of MA Graphics. While some towns are busy promoting their downtowns and local businesses, Upper doesn't even have a directory of businesses here, he said.

"We need to promote business in Upper Township," said Hagan. "Upper Township has all these businesses that nobody knows about. It's as simple as creating a website with a business directory on it. There is no directory for Upper Township as a whole."

Some Upper Township businesses are members of the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce. Tuckahoe also has its own merchants association.

The idea for a township-wide business association started when Jennifer McDermott, of Chilled Eatery, approached Hagan trying to find information on Upper Township businesses. She couldn't find any, he said.

Hagan, McDermott and Cheryl McDonough, of OCS Printing, got together with other business owners beginning in November. Hagan said he expects as many as 30 business owners at this week's meeting at the Tuckahoe Inn. A vote is scheduled to formally create an Upper Township Business Association.

"That's the first step," said Hagan, a board member of the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce.

"From there I think we will go about creating a directory of businesses so people know what businesses are here."

Mayor Richard Palombo said he was happy to see an effort to bring a business association into being. Businesses play an important role in any community, he said.

"First and foremost businesses service the people who live here but they also provide ratables to offset the tax structure," he said. "That has been a focus of the township. The planning board has worked hard to identify places where it makes sense to have businesses. On our end we have concentrated on attracting and strategically placing businesses throughout the township."

Upper Township is 63 square miles and mostly residential. Palombo said the township has worked to concentrate growth in areas like Marmora and Seaville, called town centers.

"I think it's great that businesses are looking at coming up with ideas to market their services and products," Palombo said. "The township has had a number of new businesses start up but it isn't easy. It took five years to get the ShopRite open from start to finish. The chains and franchises do a lot of bean

counting. I think we are hurt by the fact that Cape May County's population seems to be decreasing." The mayor said he would be interested to see the results of the latest U.S. Census in that regard. "We have a lot of viable opportunities to start a business," Palombo said. "South Shore Ford is one of the biggest properties out there. There have been developers interested in the past. There were tentative agreements of sale but they fell through. We are starting to get new inquiries now so hopefully that will help."

Committeeman Frank Conrad, who has served as liaison between township committee and the nascent business association, said it was important to create a good business environment.

"A good association will help bring our ratables up," he said at Monday's township committee meeting. "What we have to do as a government is to find revenue sources instead of just passing it onto the taxpayer."

Hagan said the Upper Township Business Association could look to make a splash as early as May with a festival to bring shoppers out.

"We're looking at a meet and greet, something that will bring the business owners out to meet the community," he said.

All businesses interested in starting an Upper Township Business Association can meet at the Tuckahoe Inn on Thursday, Jan. 14 at 5 p.m. More information is available by e-mailing mike@magraphics.com or calling Hagan at 390-7999.

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