

Mayor's Column  
January 19, 2015

With the New Year comes good news for our business district as vacancies are finally dwindling. I am cautiously optimistic that we have turned the corner on the post-recession downturn.

During the worst of the "vacancy" period, I was often asked what recourse the Village had to provide a disincentive to leave stores empty. The answer is unfortunately very little.

There is no penalty to the property owner for leaving stores perpetually vacant save for cleanliness violations when warranted and a twice yearly health inspection. Both of these generate cleaner facilities but negligible revenue.

Proof of the upturn in business activity is the recent addition of two national exercise venues, Pure Barre and Soul Cycle, and the recent opening of Magic Carpet Learning, a tutorial service for Grades K thru 12. Rick Restiano, an innovative photographer specializing in weddings, chose Pondfield Road for his Westchester base.

Next to open will be Candy Rox, a branch of a Rye store that sells not only unusual candies but hats, tees, watches and jewelry that will appeal to our younger residents.

Just last week, two unique eating establishments committed to the Village.

Still Meadow Gourmet, a farm to table eatery for takeout or eat in service will occupy the long vacant former Gourmet to Go premises and a traditional diner will open on Kraft Avenue near the movie theatre. The owners are the proprietors of diners in New Canaan, Fairfield and Darien.

Next Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, Haagen Dazs will host a grand re-opening celebration to herald the redesign of the store. Bronxville was chosen as the national launch site for the new corporate store design model which will be the template for every Haagen Dazs nationwide.

Thanks to a neighborhood small business model that treats patrons not just as customers but as valued friends, we have businesses with amazing longevity anchoring pivotal locations throughout our downtown.

This week, Steve Palm of Underhill's Crossing will celebrate 20 years in business and Nick DeVincenzo marked 53 years on Pondfield Road last year. Robert LaGravinese, a third generation jeweler and proprietor of the store bearing his family name, has served the needs of the Village since 1976 and the venerable Mrs. Morgan's Flower Shop has been a Village institution since 1925.

What they all have in common is the personal touch, exceptional customer service, a loyal client base and a willingness to customize – qualities that distinguish small town commerce from Internet and Big Box styles.

As is the trend nationwide, most new local business establishments are in the service or food industry, since competing with non-taxed merchandise available 24/7 on the internet makes competition difficult.

Over the recent holiday season, the Village was the recipient of two generous gifts. Resident Paige Nagle transformed a dreary empty store front into a twinkling delight and Realtors/Landlords John Gordon of Admiral Realty and Joe Houlihan of Houlihan and O'Malley generously funded free parking during the hectic last shopping days.

The members of the Bronxville Beautification Council utilized your generous donations and completely refurbished the Post Office property, enhancing an important gateway entry into our downtown.

Mindful of the very challenging local business climate the Village has been purposefully lax in vigorously enforcing some of our code provisions, most notably window display parameters. Just a cursory look along our commercial thoroughfares will reveal some very cluttered store windows with a plethora of paper notices and non-professional signs. We have begun a campaign to spruce up our streetscape by working with our merchants to produce a cleaner look. In the same vein, we also ask residents to understand that merchants can't display every fax paper sign announcing church bazaars and school plays.

In a confounding departure from past behavior, residents and businesses are now using our business district trash receptacles to deposit personal garbage. Not only does this practice waste tax payer dollars as our DPW staff must do multiple refuse trips, but the constant overflowing garbage and windblown trash cheapens the Village's streetscape. Reaching a level of profound frustration, we have resorted to combing through the trash and contacting the violators personally.

In a beautifully crafted mission statement, our predecessors in government laid forth the rationale for Village regulations. "Our regulations are intended to protect property values and create a more attractive economic climate; to protect and enhance the physical appearance of the Village and preserve its scenic man-made and natural beauty by ensuring that signage, among other requirements, is appropriate to the character of our commercial district and as a first class residential Village."

I believe this "Purpose and Intent" statement as articulated by our forefathers should be the guiding principle for all that we undertake throughout the Village now and in the future.