



Pinehurst Business Guild Promotes Village Shops and Businesses

Friday, May 02, 2014



The Village of Pinehurst has steadily evolved in the thirty-five years since local commercial realtor Marty McKenzie came up with the idea of gathering business owners in the area to form a group—the Pinehurst Business Guild—to promote a strong presence.

McKenzie recalled standing on the porch of his office in the heart of the Village one winter morning in 1978 and counting five cars. Later that day he found the retail areas in nearby Fayetteville brimming with shoppers and wall-to-wall people.

“That was the inspiration for the beginning of the Business Guild,” McKenzie said recently, “because I knew we were doing something wrong in the Village, and we had to try to fix it.”

Several months later, 25 prospective members, headed by McKenzie, met to discuss goals and projects. Ideas were kicked around. Committees were formed.

“At that time, we had some really powerful shop keepers in the Village. One sat on the Stock Exchange and (the late) Helen Edwards was one of the finest marketing people I’d ever met,” McKenzie shared, “but it was such a cohesive group because we were all broke.”

The Business Guild’s ambition was to be the advocate for the center of the Village and the shops by getting folks to drive there. McKenzie’s travels enabled him to pick up promotion ideas to bring back to



Pinehurst. Holiday parades, street festivals, a Christmas tree-decorating party and flower plantings started to take shape.

In what has become a much anticipated October event, the Holly Arts and Crafts Festival attracts the varied talents of several hundred hand-crafters, who sell their goods to folks crowding the center of the Village. The unique setting attracts thousands of locals, as well as shoppers from surrounding towns and counties, for offerings like bird houses, jewelry, clothing, pottery, seasonal decorations and candles.

The successes of the crafts festival led to the inaugural Christmas Tree Lighting, also in 1979, which was appropriately held in the center of the Village. Members of the Business Guild trimmed that first tree with ornaments donated by residents and businesses and then gathered at dusk to light the tree for the residents and visitors who came out to sing carols and share the holiday spirit.

The Tree Lighting has always been a very unique Business Guild activity which has benefitted from a successful, long-time working partnership with the Village of Pinehurst.

Natalie Dean is the Assistant Village Manager and has been the liaison between the Guild and the Village for a number of years.



“The best partnership between the two groups is definitely the Tree Lighting,” Dean said. “It is truly a joint effort and something that makes this Village so special.

“Since it is a family-friendly event with so many people in the Village on that night, we have added cookie decorating, a gingerbread house contest, and singing carols after the tree lights come on, so that folks will linger in the Village and appreciate the holiday traditions that have been so popular for over 35 years.” Village officials estimated a crowd of 800 gathered for the celebration.

Current Business Guild president Keith McDaniel plans to continue other valuable traditions,

such as the recent St. Patrick's Day Parade, which drew 1500 viewers, and the annual flower plantings that add to the beauty and appeal of the Village.

Annuals are planted in hanging baskets and in the ground, which adds to the magical beauty of this New England-style town. The Village's Beautification Committee proudly partners with the Guild to make this happen.

McDaniel and McKenzie both agree that a "throwback" item from the early days of the Business Guild would help grow membership, one of McDaniel's goals.

McKenzie contends that it didn't take long for the early Business Guild to make a difference because of the great map which was created to guide visitors around the Village.

"We developed a pretty detailed map of all the businesses which were members, which was a fantastic success," he recollected. "You may have GPS on your cars, but it still helps to have that paper in your hand. We hope to bring an updated version of that map back."

Dean is proud that the Village Council appointed her as the Downtown Manager/Business Guild liaison in 2011. The role of the Village is to support and help the group promote the business owners.



"Our business owners are important to us because our Village center is the heart and soul of this entire community. And we (the Village) brought on an events coordinator in part to help the Business Guild with special events," Dean explained. "From our perspective, there is a much stronger relationship and partnership between the Guild and the Village than there has ever been."

McKenzie went back to the way the Village was designed over a century ago.

“From day one, the original leaders knew what they were doing by identifying the stores that were needed,” he said. “There was a bank, a grocery store, a retail store.



“Today there is more diversity in the shops because the local demographics are changing. The Village has lost a lot of stores and to replace that you have to take a different tact. This is such a wonderful place to hang out and walk around the streets.”

Technology and regional promotion will be key in encouraging visitors--and locals--to pay attention to this beautiful spot. The Business Guild will encourage greater merchant participation to increase membership for a united small business and entrepreneurial community.

Meanwhile, the seasonal flowers will be planted by volunteers. The parades and community activities, designed to showcase a uniquely vibrant New England-style village, will be scheduled. The charm and the atmosphere will capture the excitement of each new guest.

And Marty McKenzie, who knows this place as well as anyone, will tell you: “There is no place on earth that can compare to Pinehurst’s assets.”