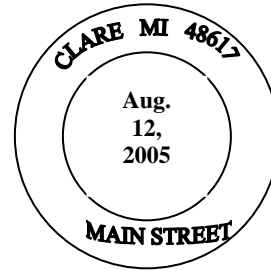


POSTMARKED: MAIN STREET



By Abigail Kulick, Main Street Manager

Greetings from Main Street! We all know that summer is considered the tourist season for downtown Clare; out-of-towners invade the many lakes that surround our little community; and as a shared success we feed off their business while they seek consumer entertainment during the day and then happily retreat to cottage life at closing time, arms filled with purchases.

Our blooming flower baskets, welcoming wooden benches, one of a kind product selection and friendly staff create an inviting atmosphere for visitors to spend their days and dollars in our Main Street district. Summer sunshine and light hearted energy provide our merchants with the motivation to be optimistic about life as a small business owner. However, as the season shift and the cold front moves in, that motivation gets buried in the snow. I would like to suggest that as a Main Street district we keep our summer mindset all year round. This warm weather optimism translates into an enjoyable experience for our customers which results in happy cash registers for our businesses. Winter months may slow the traffic, the flowers will be taken down for the season and the benches will be covered with snow but we still have the one-of-a-kind items on our shelves and the personal attention from our cheerful staff; that one-on-one special treatment that keeps people coming back for more! No matter the season Clare Main Street undoubtedly provides a unique experience to every one of its visitors; that experience alone makes downtown Clare a destination for many people.

It's inevitable, we all complain that summer goes by too fast; I've been hearing people complain about winter coming since the middle of July. It's no wonder winter blues are so powerful, we start dreading cold months in the middle of summer, by the time the season comes we've been shunning it for almost five months, of course it will be miserable. Winter blues are contagious and I want to challenge all of you business owners to avoid the blues at all costs! Go a step further and be a good neighbor, offer glad tidings and cheer to your friends when winter has them down; shovel their sidewalk, bring them hot chocolate or encourage them to get involved.....

Thus leading me to the point of this column, we have to face the facts: we live in Michigan. As Michiganders we know that we cannot predict the weather, we have no idea what this winter will bring, whether or not the roads will permit travelers to frequent our fine City or if they will limit our customers once again. Add gas prices to that equation and we could have a real problem. So what are we going to do about it?

Question: what attracts people to travel in the snow with high gas prices? Answer: a big sale. Is that the right answer? Is that good news to business owners who are trying to make a little profit? Maybe not. My suggestion: Plan B: hold a special event! Now we're talking!

Summer is fun because it is filled with activities. Let's fill winter with the same joys! If we worked as a whole community to promote our winter months even a fraction of the amount that we promote our summer months I think we would see some results. Let's create some excitement to melt the snow!

These events don't have to take a bite out of your profit the way a big sale would. Planning and hosting a special event takes A LOT of work from a few people. Well I don't know about you but I personally don't know even one person who has A LOT of free time, I do, however know of a lot of people who could make a little time to get involved in winter projects. Yes, I'm talking about you!

So let's get started! A great way to avoid the dread of winter would be to start planning events to look forward to. Of course Christmas is the highlight of the season for obvious reasons, so let's start by making our Christmas Open House bigger and better. Main Street has also been talking about a fall harvest event, what about a Valentine's Day celebration, etc, etc.? With the right ideas and more man power we can make some (or all) of these events happen. If the whole business community participates these events could be extremely powerful and would definitely encourage people to come shop in Clare, despite winter weather and high gas prices. We would be providing a priceless experience.

I know that I ask for volunteers every week, but honestly, if you want a cure for your winter blues please come forward and put some effort into attracting customers to our business community! One of Main Street's purposes is to create events such as I've mentioned, but we NEED help! Currently we do not have enough people to make these events strong enough to be successful. That's why we need YOU! Please consider getting involved! For more information call the Main Street Office at 386.9190.

Check out our website! www.mainstreetclare.com