

## Pop into the New Tourism Pop Up Centre

Owen Sound has always been a welcoming city. When you roll in via Route 26, 21 or the old 6&10 for example, the first sign to greet you is the iconic ‘green meets blue’ Owen Sound logo; you quickly realize you’ve come to a place that boasts both the Bruce Trail and Georgian Bay. Then you see the green hills literally descending to meet the blue water of the Sound and you know why exactly what the logo represents.



Inside the city limits, you’re greeted by signs pointing you towards the centre’s historic buildings and cultural attractions – there are many to choose from. But you can only fit so many signs on one post – there isn’t enough room to *really* inform you about makes Owen Sound so special. For a real sense of what the city offers, it’s best to make a visit to the Owen Sound Tourism Centre. And where is that you might ask? Well, it’s recently

‘popped’ up in the downtown core across from City Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> Street East. Now it’s even easier to ‘pop’ in to this new space to ask questions, get reading material (like some local culture magazines), and meet the people who are in the know about what the Owen Sound experience can be during Phase 3. People want to visit and spend time here, but they need to know what’s open and what’s not, where to go, and how to make the most of their visit.

One of the best people to ask is Manager of Community Development and Marketing, Brent Fisher, who facilitated the opening of the new Tourism Pop Up Centre.

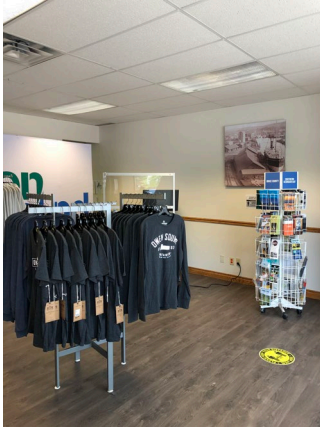
“Residents and tourists are spending more time outside, exploring our natural environment – we want to be sure we’re pointing them in the right direction. Not to places that are closed,” he says. And since most places have re-opened after Phase 3 came into effect, it’s easier to put a smile on each visitor’s face. Cultural institutions like the Tom Thomson Art Gallery have opened their doors to the public, the Farmers’ Market is back up and running on Saturdays, restaurants and bars can seat people inside or on their patio, and most stores are open for business.

Not all places are open again, though, and many have changed their hours, which is why a Tourism Centre is so important to help point both locals and tourists in the right direction.

In order to support all local businesses this summer, a pop up seemed like a great opportunity. “It was identified in the Grey County resiliency and recovery plan that



marketing and promotion was a priority of local businesses through the recovery process and being in stage 3, we are definitely at that point,” says Fisher.



And interesting times calls for interesting measures. Not only are in the midst of a pandemic on a global scale, but we’re dealing with some major closures on a local scale. The main bridge that connects the East and West sides of the city has been under construction all year and has forced the city to get innovative. “The partial closure of 1st Avenue West due to the 10th Street Bridge reconstruction and the Community Waterfront Heritage Centre being closed – it was still important to the city that we offer visitor services to support businesses and tourists. We had to get creative and do it fast,” says Fisher.

The Community Waterfront Heritage Centre is typically the spot where many visitors stop in to get information and talk to knowledgeable staff about the area. It’s also the place that hosts the Harbour Nights series Sunday evenings on non-Covid years – which has been every year leading up to this one! It’s a fitting spot to bring your lawn chair and settle in beside the historic rail car for some outdoor tunes along the water. Its absence has been noticeable this summer but the new temporary Tourism Centre is a great substitute – it’s central and still filled with knowledgeable staff and the right reading materials and City swag (I love that grain elevator logo they’ve been using – slick stuff). The choice to move downtown this summer was a good one.



Pop ups are a great way for an empty space to become a vital space, if only for a short while. It’s a common occurrence in bigger cities, so why shouldn’t it work in a smaller city like ours? It could. It should. It is. I’ve already been in for a visit – have you?

Next time you’re downtown, pop into the Tourism Centre and pop a question to the staff inside. Yes, wear your mask. Yes, keep your 6 feet. And yes, take some magazines with you. And then go and take your newfound information and explore the city that has always welcomed you.

We live where the green meets the blue – and where city staff members meet visitors with a smile and list of amazing things to do!

*Written by Jesse Wilkinson*