



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



MESSAGE FROM **MARTIN VAN KEIMPEMA,** PRESIDENT, FRENCH QUARTER BIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

2020 will certainly be a year to remember although one we would all like to forget. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the French Quarter Business Improvement Area (BIA). We are currently in a significant shut down and I can attest to the challenge this has been for our businesses. I feel I have an intimate understanding as someone who has been directly impacted by this situation: Bonnie Doon Bowling Lanes was opened only briefly during this past year with extremely limited numbers allowed in our facility.

In this report we are focusing on some statistics that are shocking. We will present some measures we have been working on and continue to work on so that we can support the relaunch of our businesses locally.

As a BIA we have also realised that although many businesses located in East Central Edmonton may not be members of our BIA, we feel a moral obligation to do what we can for the entire local economy. We fervently believe that if Ottewell, Capilano, Goldbar, and all the communities within reach of our BIA are hurting we need to look at ways to support all of these businesses. We have and are continuing to work in that direction as you will read in this report.

Our focus is on doing our part in building a stronger local economy. As business owners or managers, we need one another and we need to look at ways of collaborating because a strong local economy in East Central Edmonton is a key vision for us all moving forward.

Martin Van Keimpema

President, Board of Directors



OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2020 TO END OF MARCH 2021

In our BIA, we have seen two major negative economic impacts on our businesses in the past 18 months. The first was the reality of an important drop of our province's economy as a result of a major change in the oil and gas industry. The second started in March of 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have not had to deal with this second type of situation in the past and so we have had to adjust rapidly. Most of us have had to close our businesses, fully or partially, for health reasons and we have had to do this several times as a second wave and a third wave have impacted us again and again.

Let's look at things with a positive and an upbeat approach of what is to come. There is hope ahead as citizens do their civic duty to support all businesses: wearing masks and social distancing, shopping locally, supporting small locally owned businesses, vaccinations, etc.

In early April 2020, the French Quarter BIA Board of Directors and our Executive Director, Jean Johnson, began working to find innovative approaches to support our members. After many meetings and discussions, to take action and invest in measures that would allow us to move forward and be stronger. In our discussions we noticed a significant number of our businesses were closing down. Some businesses opened just before the pandemic and some at the beginning of this pandemic. We feel for our business owners as many have since been forced to close their doors permanently. In total we have seen the permanent closure of 40+ businesses. This is a huge proportion of our businesses and we are astounded by these numbers.

The drop in business numbers forced our Board to make some tough decisions. One was to make only frugal investments in the esthetics of our BIA: the flags on Millcreek bridge were

damaged and needed to be replaced, so we did that. We cancelled the flower barrel and flower pot programs for 2020 and for 2021 in order to show respect to our levy paying members by directing our financial resources toward real and meaningful projects focused on directly supporting our members.

It is important to mention of the City of Edmonton and the work they have been doing to support small business. The BIA tax levy was reduced (those who have paid the levy for 2021 can apply for this relief for 2022) and the City worked with the provincial government to facilitate access to relaunch funds. For all this work, our Board of directors wishes to congratulate them and thank them. It is important to note that the work of recovery is just beginning as we struggle through a third wave.



PIVOTING IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES



During the Spring and Summer of 2020, our Executive Director presented as many ideas as he could come up with in order to assist and support our members. Here are some findings we have come to believe in.

- For most small businesses, to have a storefront business only would no longer be viable during the pandemic and a hybrid business model would need to be put in place immediately and be maintained post pandemic.
- A hybrid model would need to consider how we could assist our business owners to make the switch to an online presence.
- Most small businesses either have no presence online or have a very limited presence; therefore they are not taking full advantage of the ecommerce opportunity.
- For individual small businesses to create their own online ecommerce business was too challenging and it was extremely difficult to maintain and promote it on their own.



THE SOLUTION AS WE SEE IT **WWW.**

The solution we've chosen to adopt is to build economies of scale by developing a unique ecommerce market place with a "shop local" theme. We realized that in developing an online ecommerce platform we could also support our neighbouring business communities by inviting them to be part of this ecommerce initiative.

The name selected is: www.francomarket.ca



WHY THE NAME **FRANCOMARKET?**

We wanted to continue to promote the branding of the French Quarter BIA. Although the name highlights the French aspect of our BIA, the project is for everyone regardless of origins, themes of their business or languages spoken. We are there to support everyone, capitalizing on the pre-branded concept that the French Quarter BIA name evokes.

During the Summer of 2020, we went to work describing how this project would work and how it can become a permanent

part of the solution, not just for our BIA members but also for the neighbouring communities. A proposal was submitted to Edmonton's Economic Relaunch Program and we are pleased to say that we were approved for the maximum of \$75,000. Our BIA of course needed to match this so we took our accumulated funds and approached the francophone economic development agency – Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, who contributed \$10,000 to this initiative. With a budget of \$150,000 we

proceeded to invite submissions to develop this ecommerce site in mid-September. A firm was retained and commenced working in early November with a very ambitious goal of being ready for merchants by early December.

WHERE **ARE WE** NOW?

As time went by we realised there were two major challenges. One was trying to meet small business owners while they are in survival mode. The COVID-19 health restrictions forced a reduction in the number of patrons allowed into the businesses and we preferred to step back in favour of allowing a paying patron to enter the business. We feel that a paying patron has precedence over our desire to assist the business in establishing its Francomarket.ca presence (coaching, demonstrating and

teaching how to take photos of their inventory, how to do a brief descriptor and pricing, and how to upload to our web site). As a result, recruiting businesses to our web site was a lot slower than we had hoped. We are not deterred. The work continues and over the course of the next 2 years we will continue to grow our ecommerce platform to the benefit of all businesses and merchants located in and around our BIA.



JOIN ALBERTA'S FIRST
COMMISSION FREE
LOCAL E-MARKET !



#STAND WITH LOCAL #STAND WITH SMALL
#STAND WITH ALBERTANS

www.francomarket.ca



WHY **WWW.FRANCOMARKET.CA** MAKES SENSE: **THE ADVANTAGES!**

By coming together on one platform we will have built economies of scale. We will have created a shopping experience where consumers can explore, add things to their baskets and then access a single checkout for all their purchases. The great thing about this ecommerce is that financial transactions

are exactly as in the traditional stores accepting debit or credit payments, the funds will be deposited into merchants' accounts the next day.

It is extremely important to highlight the fact that the www.francomarket.ca does not charge a commission. Businesses have

a 365-day trial period free of charge on the Francomarket ecommerce platform. There is a small monthly fee after the 365-day trial. This fee is necessary to ensure that we can continue to support the merchants who have chosen to join us online.

MARKETING

We also have the ability to develop a strong marketing strategy of 'Stand With Small' 'Stand With Local' and 'Stand With Albertans'. Multiple stores coming together on one ecommerce site provides for a higher appeal as the consumers have access to a huge inventory that can be pre-ordered and with options for pick up at

the store, curb-side pick-up or shipment to anywhere in Canada. This magnifies your market reach! It significantly increases the discoverability of your business and gives you a business permanently pivoted into the future market place. This is how we will all be doing business moving forward.





AN OVERVIEW OF **FRANCOMARKET.CA** AND WHAT WE OFFER

OUR MISSION IS TO CONNECT LOCAL SHOPPERS TO LOCAL BUSINESSES

- **A Commission Free E-Commerce Solution**
Francomarket.ca doesn't take any commission on sales. Vendors only pay a flat rate membership fee that is meant to sustain the project. The website is run by a not for profit association.
- **A Ready-to-use Technology**
We're using high end technology - sign up and start uploading your products right away. Our tools and services make it easy to manage your store, promote your products and grow your business.
- **Strong Marketing Strategy**
We will work continuously on making our website visible and reaching our audience by all means. Our year-round marketing strategy will put both the website and the vendors in the spotlight.
- **Empowering Local Business**
United we stand. If we join our efforts on a common platform and channel marketing micro-strategies into one big powerful strategy, we'll be capable of reaching local markets and bringing local businesses out of the shadow.
- **Connecting Your community**
Albertans are eager to consume locally. The rising culture of direct and local consumption benefits both the provincial economy and the environment. We must seize this opportunity to grow our local businesses and protect our economy.
- **What does the future hold for us all**
Although all we have is an intuition about the future, we have come to the conclusion that the way we did business pre-COVID-19 will no longer be the way moving forward. A hybrid approach is absolutely crucial to not only survive but to thrive. We also believe that the 'chain stores' of the past will be replaced more and more by locally owned businesses.



OTHER CHALLENGES

As most of the business closures were at the Bonnie Doon Centre, we needed to explore different ways we could assist, beyond building our ecommerce site, and to find a solution that would create a significant impact for all of our BIA.

FRANCO MARKET AT **BONNIE DOON**



Our proposal is to partner with the Bonnie Doon Center in developing a farmer's market style of market place. We are currently finalising the details of what this will look like, how we will jointly market this initiative, how we will recruit vendors, etc. The focus is on locally produced inventory: vendors who are either artisans (woodworking, jewelry, visual arts of all forms, etc.), producers of foods (produce, meats, traditional and prepared foods) or

importers of unique products. We don't really want to focus on the 'Farmers market' per se but we do wish to model some aspects of this type of marketplace at Bonnie Doon. All of the vendors will automatically become members of our ecommerce www.francomarket.ca. We are currently working with all stakeholders including AHS, to ensure a safe and positive environment.

GRAND OPENING OF THE FRANCO MARKET

We are targeting our grand opening in early June. Dates for the launching will be announced as soon as we have all of our ducks in a row: merchants signed up (we are recruiting now), AHS buy in, marketing plan finalised by mid-May, etc.

OUR WISHES **MOVING FORWARD** **ADVANTAGES OF A NEW NORMAL**

As we come out of this pandemic we truly believe that our traditional business model of store-front only will be a thing of the past. We will continue to recruit businesses to join our online market place as we will have built economies of scale by coming together on one platform and merchants will have experienced the success of this hybrid model.



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