

# Belmar Business Partnership

Managing the Belmar Special Improvement District



2011 Annual Report

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The Belmar Special Improvement District (SID) and the Belmar Business Partnership (BBP), the non-profit corporation created to manage the SID, began functioning at the start of 2011. They were formed following an extensive and deliberative steering committee process involving a cross section of the business community, residents, and the Borough's governing body.

While the search for an executive director who was a good fit for the BBP lasted until mid-May, in the meantime the organization was instrumental in bringing about an outdoor dining ordinance, an ordinance allowing the limited display of merchandise outside of stores, and an ordinance governing logos on umbrellas used outside of businesses. In spite of being an essentially volunteer organization with part-time staffing, the organization also accomplished the foundational tasks necessary to create a New Jersey corporation, including the demanding task of both reaching agreement on how to most effectively staff and who to hire as the first Executive Director.

Michael Redpath, who has been very involved in tourism and downtown revitalization in Monmouth and Ocean Counties for some time, began serving the BBP as the Executive Director May 16. Brenda Yarnold was hired as part-time assistant August 5 (Brenda left that position in January 2012).

It takes years, even decades, and a myriad of sometimes subtle factors to cause a community's business foundations to decline. Likewise, it takes several years and attention to many factors in a systems approach to arrest and reverse such a decline. Redpath im-

mediately started meetings with the BBP Board of Trustees, its committees, and Borough elected officials and administrative staff to develop a written overview of areas that would need to be addressed in order to move Belmar's business districts forward. The BBP's committees then developed a strategic plan covering through the end of 2012 and have been working that plan since.

Typically, when a community creates a special improvement district, the stakeholders want to see substantial change in a short period of time. In reality, because the decline in the business districts took place over a long period of time, they often are conscious of only the most visible and recent causes. They tend to not consider the complex impacts of changes in American lifestyles, the advent of the internet, big box shopping centers, outlet shopping centers, and regional shopping malls, among many other issues. Rather than bringing about quick fixes that typically don't last, the BBP has worked its strategic plan in order to provide stakeholders the best use of their resources while providing improvements that have a lasting effect.

This report outlines the more significant accomplishments of the BBP during 2011. The report is organized by budget and com-

mittee areas. A report of this sort also cannot adequately reflect the tremendous amount of detail that must be dealt with in order to meet legal requirements, deal with numerous agencies ranging from local to federal, and exercise good non-profit governance.

In addition, a business community often develops a culture, or cultures, in order to function in a continually more challenging environment. Some of those cultural norms actually contribute to the decline and need to be overcome in order to revitalize the business districts. Often, a significant portion of the effort of a special improvement district goes towards creating an environment where other individuals and agencies bring new contributions to the success of the business districts in response to the improved environment. The SID may not appear to be directly involved in the initiative, yet it would not have occurred were it not for the SID providing the environment.

## **Branding and Marketing**

The Branding and Marketing Committee is responsible for consumer-oriented promotion focused on getting customers into Belmar's stores, restaurants, lodging, and service businesses. The Tourism Commission does an outstanding job of bringing people to Belmar. The BBP is focusing on increasing those people's expenditures with Belmar businesses once they are here. Among other efforts, the committee:

- Encouraged Belmar businesses to take advantage of the American Express Small Business Saturday promotion and supported it with advertising in the Asbury Park Press and Coast Star, and by providing posters for mer-

chants

- Provided promotional support for the Shorelink Shuttle

- Generated positive press coverage in the Coast Star, Manasquan-Belmar Patch, and other media

- Created and maintained a temporary web site in-house

- Supported Christmas retail sales with advertising in the Coast Star and other media

- Coordinated regularly with the Chamber of Commerce on a joint consumer email newsletter which was produced on a regular basis by the BBP staff

- Began a Twitter and Facebook presence

- Provided support, including financial, for the new Belmar Tourism magazine

- Conducted a Request for Proposal process for the development of a desktop web site for utilization in recruiting businesses and keeping stakeholders informed, and a mobile web site to take advantage of the tremendous growth in the use of smartphones. M Studio of Asbury Park was chosen as the creator of the web sites and the lengthy process of developing them is underway.

- Embraced the transfer of the Belmar VIP card program from the Belmar Tourism Commission and began work towards having a revamped and expanded program by Spring of 2012.

## Business Development

The Business Development Committee is responsible for initiatives to assist existing Belmar businesses to be more successful and to attract new businesses to Belmar. Among the committee's activities in 2011, it:

- Inventoried all available commercial properties (lease and sale), photographed, maintained listings on the BBP web site, posted a Craig's List ad pointing to web page
- Instituted a Façade Grant program to encourage improvement of "curb appeal" of commercial properties
- Instituted a Fit-out Grant program to assist new businesses in locating in Belmar
- Began research in order to make recommendations regarding a possible program to provide tax abatements on commercial property improvements in order to encourage more investment improvements which ultimately result in increased tax ratable
- Developed an overview of needed market analysis information to guide recruiting and retention efforts. Purchased appropriate studies from ESRI, an international leader in such studies, at very reasonable cost. Have been working with data to develop strategies in response to the data
- Began the development of a new-business recruitment and welcome package
- Began a review of permit processes for businesses and consideration of ways in which to improve them. This has included considerable work on the process for obtaining permission to erect a sign or awning.

◦Established an ongoing review of ordinances to ensure that they are as business-friendly as possible without compromising public safety and the quality of life in Belmar

## Management

The management of the BBP is carried out by the Board of Trustees, officers, committees, and staff. The Board, officers (Executive Committee), and committees have a regular schedule for each to meet monthly. Management accomplishments in 2011 included:

- Through email blasts, functioned as a regular conduit of business-oriented information, including from Borough Hall, to the business community
- Distributed federal and state disaster recovery information to business owners following Hurricane Irene
- Working aggressively at building a data base of business and commercial property owners in order to ensure communications with them
- Ensured a high level of accountability and governance; adopted Conflict of Interest, Whistleblower, and Records Management Policies; retained accountant to set up books and prepare for annual audit; applied to IRS for non-profit status
- Ongoing education of Board of Directors regarding governance and leadership
- Hosted two stakeholder information meetings with Tom Rospos, Borough Engineer, and one networking event
- Actively involved with the Borough and the

Tourism Commission in development of Shorelink Shuttle program

◦Started developing “you are here”/ informational kiosks in order to help our customers find their way around Belmar

## Visual Improvement

The Visual Improvement Committee is responsible for creating a more attractive and welcoming appearance for Belmar’s business districts. This is accomplished through both direct action and communication with property owners. In 2011, the committee:

- Carried out plantings in beds throughout town for Spring and Summer
- Replaced decrepit Rt. 35 signs (minimalist in order to not upset NJDOT)
- Distributed holiday wreaths to 65 businesses throughout Belmar
- Provided LED-lit holiday garlands for the 38 new light poles on Main St.
- Initiated development of a wayfinding sign program that will provide welcome and directional information for visitors to Belmar.
- Created and introduced a Belmar Shines campaign to encourage and educate businesses regarding impact of each business having visual appeal and welcome
- Began design of welcome signs for the entries to Belmar that are not currently marked

## Looking forward

Many of the initiatives undertaken by the BBP require months to bring to fruition. Having done so much of the initial work on those projects in 2011, we look forward to them impacting on Belmar in 2012.

### Belmar Business Partnership Board of Trustees

Norman Einhorn, Property Owner *Secretary*  
Brian Hadden, Property Owner  
Kevin Jacobs, Property Owner *Vice President*  
Sal Marchese, Salon Marsal *President*  
Sherry Michaels, Sunstation  
Jennifer Nicolay, Council Liaison  
Gail O’Reilly, Property Owner *Treasurer*  
Dirk Reitsma, Property Owner  
Kacy Renna, Property Owner  
Frank Sementa, D’Jais  
Tom Volker, Inn at the Shore

### Staff

Michael Redpath, Executive Director  
Brenda Yarnold, Administrative Assistant\*

\* left in January 2012

## Belmar Business Partnership

Managing the Belmar Special Improvement District  
708 10th Avenue, Belmar, NJ 07719  
732-894-9022



info@belmarbusinesspartnership.com  
www.belmarbusinesspartnership.com