

## City receives grant to help local businesses go digital

**Oct. 1, 2020** — The City of St. Catharines is reintroducing its Digital Service Squad to help main street small businesses enhance their digital presence thanks to a \$72,659 grant from Digital Main Street. Funding for the grant was provided by FedDev Ontario, a federal program.

As small businesses adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19, enhancing their digital presence is more important than ever.

“We are so pleased to once again host the Digital Service Squad Program as it has proven to be a timely initiative and an important part of our recovery efforts to support businesses in our main street areas,” said Brian York, director of Economic Development and Government Relations. “Small businesses are facing overwhelming challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and have had to adapt quickly. The Digital Service Squad program is part of a concerted effort to provide targeted support to small businesses and help shorten the learning curve that comes with getting their business online.”

Digital Service Squads were first launched in St. Catharines in 2019 as part of a City-led effort to support businesses in Business Improvement Areas across Niagara. The new program will focus its efforts on downtown St. Catharines, Port Dalhousie, Facer Street and Queenston Street.

Established in 2018, Digital Main Street Ontario was recently extended thanks to an [investment of \\$42.5 million](#) from the [Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario \(FedDev Ontario\)](#) and \$7.45 million from the Ontario Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The nearly \$50-million investment will help small businesses across Ontario to pivot their operations to include online business models, regain lost revenue and become more resilient and competitive as the economy recovers. The Ontario BIA Association administers the DMS grant program to Ontario’s main street small businesses.

“Ontario’s small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the keystone of our economic recovery. That is why we have invested in Digital Main Street to help these enterprises adapt to doing business in a digital world, and take advantage of the record number of people shopping online,” said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. “Congratulations to St. Catharines on the launch of your Digital Service Squad. The work you’re doing with

small businesses in your community will help keep our main streets vibrant, support local jobs and help our economy come back strong.”

A fundamental part of Digital Main Street’s success, Digital Service Squads are teams of trained specialists who meet with small businesses, at no cost, to help them improve their online presence. The squads assist with several activities, including developing a Google My Business profile, enhancing their social media presence and providing support for basic website and e-commerce set-up. Squads will also assist qualified small businesses through the application process for a \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grant, which includes an online assessment, online training modules and the development of a Digital Transformation Plan (DTP).

“The COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario’s main streets hard, so Digital Main Street is needed more than ever,” said Kay Matthews, executive director of OBIAA. “We know businesses that participated in Digital Main Street last year were better able to cope when the pandemic hit, and we’re excited that FedDev Ontario and Ontario are providing funding to extend this important program to help businesses in communities like St. Catharines.”

#### **About OBIAA**

OBIAA is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association supports and advocates on behalf of its members through the building and nurturing of strong relationships and partnerships. OBIAA is a leader in the development and sharing of information, tools, resources and best practices, and is a unified voice on common issues.

#### **About Digital Main Street**

Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads of experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. The program was originally created in 2016 by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and a group of strategic partners including Google, MasterCard, Microsoft and Shopify. For more information, please visit [www.digitalmainstreet.ca](http://www.digitalmainstreet.ca).

#### **ABOUT Digital Main Street Ontario**

Digital Main Street was expanded across all of Ontario in 2018 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through the \$38 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative. It has been further extended through funding from FedDev Ontario and the Ontario Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The new round of funding includes \$42.5 million from the Government of Canada’s [Regional Relief and Recovery Fund](#), a national recovery initiative delivered by Canada’s regional development agencies. With \$7.45 million from Ontario, this combined federal and provincial project will strengthen Ontario’s economic

capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration, and will promote the development of a strong and diversified Ontario economy. For more information, please visit [www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants](http://www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants)

For more information on the program, visit [www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants](http://www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants)

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