

MEDIA RELEASE

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Business Grant Recipients:

Linda Lytle, Lakeside House of Pizza: 810-966-7199

Alma Diggs, Aj's Too Millinery & Hair Boutique: 810-966-0544

Kristine Tremble, ALD Thermal Treatment: 810-357-0681

Jacob Gilbert, Gilbert's Automotive: 810-966-9380

Mark Prochazka, Schwem's Rubber Stamp: 810-984-1771

Patricia Moran, Blue Water Dry Cleaners: 810-982-2591

Dr. Ian Shaw, Shaw Chiropractic: 810-989-7429

CHAMBER DISTRIBUTES GRANTS TO PORT HURON BUSINESSES

PORT HURON – The Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce has distributed \$34,750 in grants to seven Port Huron businesses, completing the one-year agreement it made with the City of Port Huron to provide support to businesses outside of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) district.

The seven businesses that received grants were able to prove to chamber officials their need met the grant criteria to provide start-up assistance or funds to existing businesses for improvements and/or diversification expected to improve sales and job growth. Most businesses expected to match or exceed the grant investment to complete their projects.

The City of Port Huron allocated a total of \$50,000 to the Chamber of Commerce for fiscal year July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010. The Chamber created a Business Council committee, made up of volunteer business members, to oversee the funds which were placed in a separate bank account for tracking and accountability purposes, and to develop a plan to best utilize the grant. The committee included David Brandt, the Chief Financial Officer of E&A Credit Union; Shawn Starkey, Executive Director of Public Relations, Marketing and Legislative Affairs for St. Clair County Community College; Mike Kelley, a Certified Public Accountant with Frohm, Kelley, Butler & Ryan, PC; and Mike Bacheller, owner of Duraclean by Bacheller.

The first priority of the business council was to create and distribute a survey to Port Huron businesses to establish a benchmark for business satisfaction and to identify the challenges and needs of the business community. The survey was distributed in August 2009 with results compiled and analyzed in September 2009. Approximately 1,600 businesses received the

survey and nearly 10% of recipients completed it. The results of the survey indicated that the business community wanted the funds to be used for business grants and marketing and promotion of the business community. The Chamber spent \$3,500 on the cost of creating, printing, mailing and compiling the survey results.

In October 2009, the business council created a budget for marketing and promotion and developed a holiday radio and billboard promotion that targeted Canadian consumers from Sarnia to London, Ontario to shop in Port Huron. The target area was determined by the results of the Chamber's "Economic Impact of Canada on St. Clair County" study also completed in October. The promotion ran from November 20, 2009 – December 20, 2009. Lamar Advertising and Blackburn Radio in Ontario handled the promotional campaign which totaled \$4,500.

Also in October 2009, the City of Port Huron closed its downtown welcome center facility located next to the Chamber and moved its Downtown Port Huron, Inc. representative to the 4th floor of City Hall during a restructuring. The City asked the Chamber to offer welcome center services including public restrooms. The Chamber willingly complied and used \$2,500 of city funds to develop a retail space in its lobby including Port Huron sweatshirts, t-shirts, hats, nautical tote bags, historical books and literature from local authors, Bridged Art photography by Rose Norton, postcards, key chains and more.

"The City really wanted the Chamber to have a retail piece anyway since we face both McMorran and Huron Avenue and the welcome center store was the perfect way for the Chamber to meet that obligation. We continue to expand the store offerings as we go," said Ledsworth.

While the marketing promotion was running, the business council developed criteria for the City of Port Huron "For Better Business" Grant Program. Several business grants, capped at \$5,000 each, would be distributed to Port Huron businesses that needed funds to help them grow their customer base and profitability. Grant applications were solicited from late November 2009 – March 31, 2010, and a total of 34 business grant applications were received.

The first business grant was awarded to Shaw Chiropractic in March for an expansion project to add a physical therapy and massage therapy area in the lower level of their office building which would diversify their business and add 2-3 additional employees to their staff.

The other six grants were distributed in May by the Chamber of Commerce, “The funds from the City have been re-invested into growing businesses in our community – half existing businesses and the other half new business ventures – and all of these investments will help improve revenue,” said Chamber President, Vickie Ledsworth.

The recipients are detailed below:

Business	Project/Need	Private Investment	Re-investment Grant from City
Shaw Chiropractic 1002 10 th Ave.	Lower level remodel to add chiropractic physical therapy and massage therapy area; adding 2-3 jobs	\$25,000	\$5,000
ALD Thermal Treatment 2656 24 th St.	Communication station for growing manufacturing plant to inform employees of quality and safety procedures to improve workplace performance; adding 25+ jobs	\$9,363	\$5,000
AJ’s Too Millinery & Hair Boutique 837 Griswold St.	Minority woman-owned business adding retail hat store and remodeling salon for handicap accessibility; providing private area for custom made wigs for cancer patients	\$16,570	\$5,000
Gilbert Automotive 1903 Bancroft St.	Exterior improvements to eliminate disrepair and blight of building and new hoist to improve automotive services; add 2 full-time employees	\$5,000	\$5,000
Schwem’s Rubber Stamp 1502 10 th St.	Purchase of engraving machine to meet growing customer demand and to improve efficiency of service	\$6,678	\$5,000
Lakeside House of Pizza 3561 Gratiot Ave.	Purchase of more energy efficient larger freezer to meet higher volume of sales; exterior signage on corner of Gratiot & Holland; outdoor seating to accommodate more customers; increase seasonal staff	\$1,000	\$5,000
Blue Water Dry Cleaners 1402 Lapeer Ave.	Corner lot – need for improved signage on both Lapeer Ave & 14 th Streets to generate new business; add 2 part-time employees	\$0	\$4,700
	TOTAL	\$63,611	\$34,750

The business council committee had planned more advertising and promotions for business in the spring but felt with other activities by Downtown Port Huron Inc. and the Blue Water Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, it wasn't the right time and switched gears offering instead a 4-hour workshop titled, "Explode Your Sales – Marketing Ideas So Simple (but effective) They'll Blow Your Mind!" designed specifically for retailers and service businesses aimed at providing low-cost ways to improve foot traffic, generate more from the average sale, and boost profits. The total cost of the educational program presented by entrepreneur and national marketing expert, Bob Negren, WhizBang! Training was \$4,200. While the seminar was targeted to downtown retailers, businesses from all of St. Clair and Sanilac Counties were invited to participate.

On behalf of the business council committee, the Chamber of Commerce wrote a funding request letter to the City for the next fiscal year totaling \$25,000. The funding request was reduced because the committee felt the City may have less funds to allocate to the program and the committee could restrict the funds entirely to business grants next year. However, the group would be willing to do additional tasks if the City requested.

"Business lending remains tight so these grants are a crucial support mechanism that the City can offer. By helping businesses make improvements to grow and diversity and add employees, it's a win-win," said Ledsworth. "The professionals on this committee have developed a sound accountable system for tracking and distributing these funds and the City could continue to show their support for business by allowing us to facilitate the program again."