

A Grassroots Effort to Improve the Business Climate in Larchmont

A few months ago Larchmont residents Tiffany Smith and Amy Sullivan got word of an upcoming Larchmont Chamber of Commerce meeting that was open to the public. They decided they would attend to express their concerns about the local business climate and storefront vacancies. Little did they know they would soon embark on a massive mission.

The Larchmont Chamber of Commerce is led by Carolyn Fugere, who was appointed President of the nearly abandoned organization last November. Fugere, who also heads Julia B Fee Sotheby's International Realty's Larchmont brokerage, has brought new life and tremendous growth to the organization in the face of challenging times for the town's business district. Her agenda for the upcoming meeting was simple; engage the attendees in a positive and productive manner. Fugere had arranged a round-table format for this meeting providing all attendees the opportunity to voice ideas and concerns in small intimate groups.

At the meeting Smith and Sullivan joined business owners, employees of local businesses, local politicians and other residents and



Left to right: Carolyn Fugere, President, Larchmont Chamber of Commerce and head of Julia B Fee Sotheby's International Realty Larchmont; Amy Sullivan - Co-Founder Love Larchmont; Tiffany Smith - Co-Founder Love Larchmont

together they reviewed Chamber accomplishments, plans, and immediate needs. One message was consistent at each table, more help was needed from the community to truly make an impact.

Smith and Sullivan took the experience as a call to action and the initiative, dubbed "Love Larchmont," was launched. Their goal was to promote and revitalize local

business and shopping, improve the aesthetic appeal of the village, and develop a stronger feeling of community among local residents.

Smith and Sullivan began by putting together a focus group of local residents comprising analysts, retail executives, lawyers and more to brainstorm initial ideas of what Larchmont's needs might be, and from there launched several

social media pages, including a Facebook group that grew to 1,500 members in as little as one week and continues to increase. The significant interest quickly drew the attention of Larchmont Mayor Anne McAndrews, who asked for a meeting with the organization's two founders.

Next, Smith and Sullivan invited Larchmont residents to respond to an online survey designed to answer questions about local individuals' shopping habits. According to Smith, the survey drew tremendous interest, with 1,321 respondents completing the questionnaire. The findings indicated a strong desire to shop in town versus online and to see more retail and restaurant options, but only non-chain stores that will help to maintain the town's charm. With the goal of increasing in-town shopping, "Love Larchmont" is now drawing upon the survey results to determine ways to raise awareness, collaborate with small businesses to create incentives, utilize social media to the best advantage and more.

"We've started people thinking: I could go online and buy, or I could go into town on my bike to shop and get a coffee," said Smith,

who noted that "Love Larchmont" now has three separate committees of approximately 35 people each working on ideas. "We've really hit the ground running and haven't stopped."

Sullivan shared that eight years ago, when her family decided it was time to move from the city to the suburbs they were not happy about giving up the convenience and ease of their Brooklyn neighborhood. "When we found Larchmont, we knew we found what we were looking for. The downtown was full of charming shops and restaurants, the schools were wonderful and the views and access to the sound were breathtaking.

Ultimately, "Love Larchmont" intends to work closely with the Chamber of Commerce to draw in new businesses, as well as nurture an ongoing relationship with members of the community to maintain a constant awareness of Larchmont's changing needs.

In her role as President of the Chamber of Commerce, Carolyn Fugere has already seen the chamber become reinvigorated in recent months, and she hopes that "Love Larchmont" will continue that trend. "I am excited to work with

both the chamber and 'Love Larchmont' to make our community even more attractive to prospective new residents by revitalizing our business district," said Fugere, who recently introduced as many as 100 out of town real estate agents to the town by hosting a summer tour of listings in the area. "Locals and visitors alike know that Larchmont is a very special place to be."

Growth in the business district is on the rise. Eight new businesses have come to Larchmont over the last 12 months and for the first time in years the local businesses really have a nice synergy going. Fugere reports that when she took over the helm, the Larchmont Chamber of Commerce had about 35 active member businesses, "just this week we welcomed our 96th member!"

"Next year is going to be a banner year for Larchmont. We will have a new streetscape, it's our 125th anniversary and I am sure we will have welcomed our 100th Chamber member by then."

For more information contact: Larchmont Chamber of Commerce, info@larchmontchamber.org or Carolyn Fugere, President (914) 327-1522

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