

The Local Yokel

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By April Cappel

By now everyone is getting back into the swing of things. The kids are back into their yearly school routine, parents are madly dashing around attempting to run their kids from one program to the next. Politicians are canvassing and hoping for the best, and the men folk (and of course some ladies too!) are gearing up for that one time a year they get to go out into the woods and partake in yearly bonding rituals!

Of course, for most merchants and business owners, this is the prelude to the Christmas season. A season that means increased planning, ordering, decorating and marketing, in hopes of competing in the mad rush of shopping that will begin just after Halloween! (Although I do know there are those shoppers, not including myself, who have already begun!)

So how does one get “the edge” on Christmas Sales? Well, as consumers, I think we are going to be looking for several things, but the one thing that tends to tip the scales in the merchants favor can be *Customer Service!*

We have all been there! Everyone has their story! But what can be done to increase the chances of better customer service, benefiting both the consumer (for the experience!) and the merchant (for the increase in sales!)

The month of October promises to be a month to help address these issues in Renfrew County.

The Buy Local Campaign will be announcing the beginning of a program headed by our newest member, Catherine Higgins, whose sole purpose in life for the next 6 months will

be to develop and implement the “Elite Culture of Customer Service” program within the county.

Holding true to form for Buy Local, this program will be instrumental in increasing awareness and resources for business within Renfrew County in a very pro-active way. The program will include aspects such as making examples of Excellent Customer Service, both through opportunities for training and support, but also with follow up programs like secret shoppers, who will be looking for service above and beyond. (However, you will have to wait a little longer before I let the cat completely out of the bag!)

Typically in October, various cities and organizations will be holding events to participate in Small Business Week. This is a week of national recognition of entrepreneurship across Canada.

This year, Jennifer Layman, owner of Forward Thinking, and Shawn Gallant, owner of OttawaValley.com, together have prepared a 3 day seminar. This seminar will include 34 one hour presentation aimed at owners, managers and employees, as well as potential new small businesses in the making.

The 2007 Ottawa Valley Small Business Week event will be taking place from October 15-17, 2007, at the Best Western Pembroke Inn. The tickets are \$25 in advance, \$35 at the door and include the cost of all 3 days of seminars. For more information, please Go to [www.downtownpembroke.com](http://www.downtownpembroke.com) or watch this months edition of OttawaValleyBusiness.com

The following week promises to be a great follow up in Renfrew, with Enterprise Renfrew County's "Bridges to Better Business". This full day program, Wednesday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, is a Retail and Main Street Summit, and will be held at Renfrew's Best Western on Gillan Road.

The day's activities include 3 excellent speakers, including: Derek Nighbor, Vice-President (National Affairs) with Retail Council of Canada; Retail Consultant, Pierre Cliché, a Personal Coach and Author of "Business Strategies for Downtown and Rural Merchants", and Keynote speaker Joshua Bloom. Joshua specializes in teaching communities how to revitalize their commercial centers. He promises to be an informative, knowledgeable and entertaining speaker.

The day will also consist of lunch, many networking opportunities as well as a question and answer period with a panel of successful businesses.

Tickets are only \$10 before October 1<sup>st</sup>, after that they will be \$20. You can find more information and register for this one day event at [www.enterpriserenfrewcounty.com](http://www.enterpriserenfrewcounty.com), or by contacting Colleen Sadler at 613.432.6848.

It is important to note that the success of these programs depends solely on individual's choice to participate. It is efforts like these that will bring about the changes we are all looking for within our communities. Like the simple act of making the choice to vote, making the choice to attend, and use your voice can make the difference!

Hope to see you there!