

Appearances and first impressions are important.

“When you go to another city and see all their hanging plants and flowers on the boulevards, it brightens your day and you feel welcome. That is the feeling I am starting to get with what they are doing with our downtown in Thompson,” said Stacey Cameron, Robins Donuts employee.

Those words should be like music to the ears of the Thompson Downtown Revitalization Committee, whose vision is “to enhance and encourage downtown community pride and involvement in the downtown area.” Committee members developed a strategy that rests on three pillars: Activity, appearance and infrastructure.

The pillar of appearance is gaining considerable positive attention. One of the volunteer committee members, Wess Savorn, has extensive education and experience in landscape design and horticulture. And he is positively passionate about the work of the committee.

“When you are designing for a growing season in a place like Thompson, you simply don’t count on one,” he said. “So, you plant something that will do well if it’s a cooler summer; something that will do well if it is hot, something that can handle a dry season. That way, you can count on one or two doing very well.”

With that principle, the committee, with funding from the City of Thompson, installed 16 self-watering flower planters with a mixture of petunias, potato vines and lamina. The boulder and shrub plots on the centre strip feature dogwoods and yellow dogwoods, both for their hardiness and for their colours, as were the trees planted on various boulevards in the city.



“The boulders weigh about 400 pounds each. It took three of us to move them,” said Wess. “The department of highways provided some valuable insight that helped with the placement of the boulders.”

Having all sectors of the community on board is important to keeping the project moving forward,

according to Nick Di Virgilio, owner of North Center Mall and secretary of the Lions Club. Nick is not part of the committee, but he has invested more than \$20,000 to make the landscape in front of his downtown business looking attractive.

“I don’t mind spending the money. It’s good for my property and it’s good for the community,” he said. “Roxie Binns and the committee have done tremendous work. Now, it will be up to other businesses, the snow clearing crews, the City and the City Centre Mall to make sure they help continue this improvement. We have to be careful in winter that salting and clearing snow from the roads and sidewalks does not cause damage to the good work that has been done.”

Roxie said that communication with all stakeholders will ensure that issues around damage, safety and the ability to continue improvements are met. “We want people to know we are a centre of excellence. We can do that best by working together in all our activities, whether it be downtown revitalization, winter weather testing, University College of the North, Spirit Way or any of our cultural and sporting events.”

“Collaboration, such as we’ve seen with the Downtown Revitalization Committee, is so important to renewing community pride,” said Mayor Tim Johnston. “You can almost feel the energy as the committee makes plans to move forward.”



“It is impressive, after having left Thompson for a vacation and returned to see the changes,” said Dan Brown of McDonalds Restaurant. “This summer was so different from my first impression of downtown Thompson six years ago. If I could make a suggestion to the committee, it would be to do some of the same on Thompson Drive and further south on Mystery Lake Road to complete the picture; and to enhance the green space beside McDonalds and Staples.”

Those words will be like fire starter to Wess, who is already brimming with ideas to take to the committee, when it moves forward this spring. “There’s so much we can do, even in an area like Thompson that has a short growing season,” he said. “I think the more positive feedback we get from the community, the more you will see happen.”

The Thompson Downtown Revitalization Committee is volunteer based and includes: Ron Trainor, Avis Johnston, Jeff Schultz, Wess Savorn, Rui Lima and Tamy Burton. In addition, there are representatives from throughout the community: Judy Kolada, City Council; Christine Auger, Chamber of Commerce; Bruce Krentz and Jim English/City Parks and Recreation; Tara Howse, Thompson Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation; and Roxie Binns, Betty Landego and Mark Matiasek, Thompson Unlimited.

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