

Uber-positive event solves city's problems

Organizers hope that by keeping it upbeat, the city will be able to move on from its many woes

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Steel plant jobs dwindling, business owners shutting doors, door-to-door salespeople hassling the elderly, graffiti everywhere, and no one is working together.

What can this city do?

Well, if the Center for Social Justice and Good Works (CSJGW) has anything to say about it, a lot.

Creative, positive solutions to the some of city's most difficult problems were being shared at the Essar Centre Thursday night.

“(This event) is about changing people’s frame of mind, taking two hours out of their day and instead dedicating it to thinking positive and try to come up with positive based ideas and solutions for our community,” said Christine Coutu, Executive Director for the CSJGW.

The event was dubbed ‘Talk on the Walk’, a roughly two hour discussion-based seminar whose main idea is simple – bring together community leaders with the public and have solution-focused discussions.

“We know there are a lot of negative things but (here) we’re asking that if you have negative feedback to put a positive spin on it. This isn’t just a forum for complaints,” said Coutu.

After the discussions, participants were encouraged to hand in ‘Positive Change Postcards’ their improvement suggestions.

After the event Coutu counted 66 submitted postcards with around 75 suggestions (some had more than one).

The CSJGW plans to release a report on the event's findings.

The event was organized into five discussion topics: Employment, Community Safety, Entrepreneurship, Community Mobilization, and Youth.

Employment

Perhaps the biggest employment challenge facing the Sault is that we’re moving away from high-paying steel plant type jobs to fast food jobs, said Rory Ring, executive director of the

Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce (SSMCC), who was one of the employment discussion leaders.

“If you look at statistics available . . . employment opportunities are trending down in jobs like ones that pay \$75,000 in the manufacturing industry. If you start to replace those jobs with ones that only pay \$30,000-35,000, it brings some social and financial stresses (to both the family and the city as a whole),” he said.

Ring said employers are telling SSMCC they can’t find skilled workers.

The solution?

Get people trained so they’re qualified for these skilled jobs.

Community Safety

Aggressive door-to-door sales tactics, for instance people selling furnaces, were brought up as a community safety topic.

“People have a genuine fear of door-to-door selling. They felt it targeted vulnerable and elderly people. If a person who’s on a fixed income loses money, how are they supposed to live within their means?” said discussion leader Sonny Spina, who was there in his capacity as director of public relations for Norpro Security & Investigation.

Finding ways to educated people about these door-to-door sellers was the solution.

Perhaps Emergency Services and city staff could go door-to-door with volunteers to raise awareness.

“The bottom line is community safety is everyone’s issue, we can’t pawn it off to any city or emergency service,” said Spina.

Entrepreneurship

There may be opportunities for young people who want to start their own business in the Sault.

70 per cent of business owners are in their 60s and 70s and, based on those demographics alone, it likely means that in the next ten years, 70 per cent of those owners will need to be shutting down, said Jason Naccarato, one of the entrepreneurship discussion leaders.

“(What we need to do) is get those succession plans into place and maybe transfer ownership of the business to someone young. The owner may be an expert in their business field but they’re not an expert in succession and ownership transfer,” said Naccarato.

Community Mobilization

Community Mobilization is all about getting people to work towards a common goal.

There was a business owner at the event who recently retired and couldn't find anyone to buy his business so instead of selling, he just closed the doors.

A discussed solution to this issue was to bring young and veteran entrepreneurs together.

"If I teach you as a youth how to do this business you might even be able to teach me some things about how to market your business on Facebook or social media, whatever the case may be. You really want to work with your youth, to develop a plan, and maybe you can find someone to take your business over and you're creating employment for another group coming up," said city Councilor Ross Romano, who ran the community mobilization discussion.

Youth

The Gore Street Café, and getting kids to have creative outlets, was a hot topic of discussion concerning youth.

"They need some help with their infrastructure and they also run great things for the artistic community, especially young people, to help them kind of have an avenue to express and play and that seems to be lacking in other facets around the Sault," said Josh Ingram, one of the facilitators of the youth discussion.

Having more creative outlets for youth was a discussed solution to the more recently controversial graffiti issue as well.