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Bottom Lines: Physical bridge between Ocean City, Somers Point leads to figurative one

KEVIN POST, Business editor | Posted: Sunday, August 29, 2010

Businesses in Somers Point have long been connected to the robust tourism market of Ocean City.

Now the revitalized Somers Point Business Association is hoping to develop closer ties to the island in conjunction with the massive upgrade of the causeway connecting the two municipalities.

“The new bridge on Ninth Street is going to be a dynamic change for the two cities,” easing the drive and adding a pedestrian and bicycle connection for the first time, said Lou DeScioli, association president.

“While the two cities have always complemented each other, they will find themselves in a stronger position to regionalize their business environment,” he said.

Michele Gillian, executive director of the Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce, said, “We’re so close to each other, we really are their bridge partners.”

She said the groups have a good relationship and have held mixers together and coordinated event schedules to avoid conflicts and maximize results. Many businesses are members of both organizations.

“We’re being connected more closely by a great project,” Gillian said. “When they do well, we do well, and when we do well, they do well.”

The Somers Point Business Association’s latest project, an upgraded website, began with admiration for the online site of the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce, he said.

Gillian said the chamber met with the association a couple of times to discuss its website development.

DeScioli said the group hired Suasion Communications Group/Smith O’Keefe of Egg Harbor Township to design and create its website.

“They did a marvelous job,” he said. “It has all the bells and whistles, with top tabs for what the town and businesses in town have to offer.”

Members of the association have been trained in maintaining the website so it can be updated quickly, he said.

“We’re hoping it will be the flagship for concentrated promotion of businesses in Somers Point,” DeScioli said.

A major new effort by the business association will be the city’s first Restaurant Week, which is planned for Oct. 18 to 24.

The association expects 20 restaurants to participate and offer either a fixed price menu for \$25 or 25 percent off the food check. Restaurants interested in participating should call 609-653-4586 by Sept. 1.

Such joint promotional efforts have been part of the Somers Point Business Association’s work since its founding in 1983, said DeScioli, a charter member. Others have included a citywide promotional map and newspaper inserts.

“Most of our efforts for all those years were in business advocacy, making sure regulations in Somers Point were reasonable for existing businesses to expand or new businesses to come into town,” he said.

For example, the association worked with the city and its planning board on revising the city master plan, and worked with local fire companies to have “home rule” on required inspections for businesses.

The association also created the Business School Partnership, which became the Somers Point Education Foundation. In 11 years, that has endowed the city schools with \$200,000 and contributed \$25,000 annually to school projects.

The association also holds 10 networking meetings a year, with speakers on topics of interest to city businesses.

DeScioli said he hopes more businesses will join the 65 members of the association in their efforts on behalf of the business community.

Members get a listing on the website and buy a banner ad, he said, which might provide an additional incentive to join.

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