

**Summary Report**

**Twin Villages Business Forum Summary Report**

The Twin Villages Business Forum was held on September 22, 2017. What began as a discussion to bring more jobs to the region, eventually transformed into a reflection of our local economy, and the desire to hear from the leaders in the many successful sectors in Damariscotta and Newcastle, Maine. With the knowledge of how our businesses are staying successful in this ever-changing economy, we have a better appreciation for the current business climate, how the different sector leaders are making it work, where the growth opportunities are, and how we can help in the future.

**Goals/Outcomes**

* **To collaborate with all of the economic development organizations and leaders in our area.**

The forum host committee was comprised of representatives from the Damariscotta-Newcastle Rotary, the Towns of Damariscotta and Newcastle, the Twin Villages Alliance, the Chamber of Commerce, Lincoln Academy, the Small Business Administration, the Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission, and several leaders from the non-profit and business community. This collaboration between organizations and sectors lead to the many positive outcomes of this event.

* **To provide a meaningful and relevant event**

In the early planning stages of the event, the host committee sent out an online survey to their respective e-lists, to ensure that the forum addressed the “top of mind” issues of the area business people. Ninety-one (91) responses to the survey were received and evaluated. The survey results determined the forum’s agenda and the topics for the nine break-out sessions, and 3 plenary sessions (see attached). After the forum, a satisfaction survey was sent out to forum participants. The overwhelming result was very positive, with a resounding vote to hold another forum next year.

* **To market the event effectively, and provide new ways of outreach.**

The forum committee recognized the shifts that have occurred in event marketing and promotion in recent years. To ensure that we caught the attention of all sectors and age groups, the Committee recruited the help of younger business people. The forum committee created and managed both a Facebook and Instagram page, and developed a webpage for the event, providing a beautiful layout of the event, and a very easy way to register online. We combined these marketing ideas with traditional posters hung around town, print advertising in area newspapers and MaineBiz, and a banner hung in a prominent location leading up to the event. The forum graced the cover of the September issue of the Lincoln County Magazine, which included a full-length story within. Seventy people pre-registered for the event, with a total of 135 people attending (including presenters, vendors and committee members). Indicators of successful marketing included many registrants from outside the Twin Villages, and participation from young business owners and their networks.

* **To celebrate the assets of our communities by showcasing the local economic drivers, local food hub, and local talent**

Everything about the forum promoted the assets of our community. The venue, a beloved local landmark, (Round Top Farm), was donated by the Damariscotta River Association, the event’s logo was designed by the local publishing company, the “Taste of the Twin Villages” lunch buffet was donated by local restaurants, bakers and food purveyors (including local oysters grown in the Damariscotta River, and ice cream sundaes from Round Top Ice Cream), the local phone company and internet provider made sure that wifi was available throughout the day, and the break-out sessions were led by area leaders in many diverse sectors. Students from the local high school, Lincoln Academy, were in attendance. The plenary sessions covered topics such as workforce development and social media tools – topics mentioned as important issues to local businesses. Each participant received a swag bag that contained a bunch of goodies ranging from local economic data to a chocolate bar.

**Lessons Learned:**

The lessons learned from this experience were mostly administrative. For example, we will turn off the online registration earlier, to ensure a better final count. The best lesson we learned was that many participants weren’t aware of so much going on in our area, and they were excited to be at an event that “cross pollinated” the different sectors and parts of their lives they love the most.

**Financials:**

The committee developed a draft budget for the event, not knowing what the expenses would be. The final cost of the event was $6,500.00. Without the very generous donations of the venue and the lunch buffet, this amount would have been much higher. We could not have run this event without the funding from Lincoln County’s ASK grant and Damariscotta’s donation from the Orton Foundation.

**Future Plans:**

The forum committee held a brief meeting after the event to touch base, and will be meeting again soon to determine plans for a follow-up event.

Respectively submitted by Mary Kate Reny, Chair

Twin Villages Business Forum