



Printer-friendly story
Read more at tcpalm.com

Port St. Lucie event offers promos, sales to highlight small businesses

Monday is deadline for businesses to register for event

By Christin Erazo

Monday, November 7, 2011

PORT ST. LUCIE — Despite a somewhat turbulent economy, the city has seen an increase in the number of small businesses openings, so officials are hoping a two-day shopping event will drive local sales and spotlight community businesses.

"Community Days" is a new initiative from the city's Building Department that will grant local commercial businesses a free special-events permit to showcase their products and services. Special-events permits are required for businesses to have sidewalk sales, tent sales and other heavily promoted events.

Typically, permits are \$475 for businesses in St. Lucie West; \$375 for businesses in the rest of the city.

The city also will advertise a list of participating businesses so residents can travel to each business location on Nov. 11 and 12. Each business will feature a special promotion or incentive for customers during the event.

"We think if businesses all have an opportunity to have a special event, totally free, they'll be encouraged to have an event to draw customers," said Joel Dramis, the city's building code administrator.

Dramis said one of the advantages to the event is that customers will become aware of businesses in their community they otherwise drive by everyday. He hopes the program's long-term effect will mean consumers will begin to shop locally rather than driving south to the Treasure Coast Square mall in Martin County or north to Vero Beach.

In October, 225 new businesses opened in the city, 13 percent more than the same month last year, Dramis said. In September, 292 new businesses opened, more than doubling the 119 businesses that opened in the same month the previous year.

Dramis said there are 8,010 active businesses in the city.

Cheri Buescher, co-owner of the local restaurant and bar Sixty Sundaes, plans to participate in the event and hopes it will give her small decade-old business the boost it

needs to stay afloat.

Last June, Buescher and her business partner expanded their business and moved to a new location on Port St. Lucie Boulevard to be more visible. Buescher said the ill-timed move during an economic dip has seen her bills go up and business slow down.

"Our regular customers don't come as often as they did, so we're hurting," Buescher said. "We're kind of unique, we're a bar and grill, we're an ice cream shop, we have live music every night and Sunday we're a football bar. We're a little bit of everything and we hope to have something more to offer. I hope we gain some new customers and let everyone know we're still here."

Buescher, a former teacher with the St. Lucie County School District, left teaching to become a business owner and, despite the rough economy, has no regrets. She said she's glad the city is focusing on small businesses.

"I think small businesses are the backbone of this community — it was the mom-and-pop organizations that built Port St. Lucie," Buescher said. "It was all mom-and-pops before we got the Walmarts."

According to the Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy, small business is defined by having fewer than 500 employees.

Larry Pelton, president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, said by that definition, many if not all business in St. Lucie County falls under this category.

"Small business drives our economy, statewide, regionally and local," he said. "Most of the employment in the private sector of our county is a composite of small companies."

Pelton said the reason why many "mom and pop" shops fail is because they're consumer related and hurt when consumers decide to spend less money. But, he said, if businesses have weathered the economic storm this long, they'll do well when the economy recovers.

"My opinion is if they're in business today, this deeply into this economic downturn, they've got a good business model and they're survivors," Pelton said.

"Community Days"

When: Nov. 11 and 12

Who: Businesses in commercial areas of the city

What: Business owners can hold a special event to showcase their products or services
To qualify: Businesses must have a current city business tax receipt, formerly known as an occupational license
Register: Online permit application at www.cityofpsl.com

Deadline: Nov. 7



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online