

New Orangeville map to show locations of local charities

By Constance Scrafield

Ross Hutchings wants to put as many not-for-profit organizations and charities on a new map of Orangeville as he can.

The map is otherwise an advertising device showing all the businesses that belong to his Helm Group, with small notes about who they are and what they do. He wants to offer this outreach to the not-for-profit and charitable organizations for free as part of his willingness to give back to the community.

Himself a businessman with an electronics shop, from which he has since retired, Mr. Hutchings says it occurred to him that there must be new ways to advertise inexpensively.

At some point, he took note of the 'cigarette doors' in gas stations specifically and, one day, asked one of the owners if he could advertise on those doors.

'In a way, we were helping the government achieve their goal by obliging retailers to hide cigarettes behind those doors,' he explained. 'People were still thinking about cigarettes as they looked at the doors hiding them but when we put our ads on them, it gave them something else to think about. We call them Media Walls, not cigarette doors.'

Soon, he realized he was getting calls as a result of the ads and, so, began accepting the requests of other businessmen to join in the system, simple as it was. Naturally, he charged a fee for organizing the matter.

'I've always been the guy that people would call to see if I knew someone to do a job. I wanted to put a networking group together but not just standing around pushing their business' so, we started with breakfasts. People like to do business with someone they know,' said Mr. Hutchings. 'Our job is more like a host: people in the group know each other, buy from each other. This way we keep the money within the group.'

Like many other good ideas, skillfully navigated, Mr. Hutchings' was somewhat organically grown and has flourished because people love community. By now, some 150 local businesses are involved with the Helm Group, for all of whom Mr. Hutchings works at promoting their services and products through his system of inexpensive advertising and himself handling distribution of the various publications they produce.

'There was whining that not everyone could do breakfasts' now we have dinner once a month and hit-and-miss lunches when we can,' he mentioned.

'People pay their membership and I work for them, promoting what they do,' he said.

Since the inception of the Helm Group, they have opened offices in Barrie, Ottawa and Calgary.

Asked how they do that, he explained: 'We go there and meet people, start it up and make sure we have someone we know to run it.'

Recently, his computer technicians have begun to work with programmatic advertising as a separate venue with some good success for those who have bought into it. It is all part of the intent to spread the word about who people are and what they do.

The map is a new project with 4,000 to be printed once all the information is in. It will be a normal-sized, folding map with the illustrations of the town and relevant companies, etc., on one side and all their information on the other. The couple on the front of the map are an old-fashioned pair: 'Old school, comfortable,' we were told.

Mr Hutchings is looking for non-for-profit, charities, government buildings, parks, tourist attraction, community clubs. The space is naturally limited, so he is hoping organizations will contact him as soon as possible. There is also still some room for businesses.

The map is to be distributed in places like the Information Centre, gas stations' wherever there is a flow of people.

For more information and to be part of the map project, organizations can contact him at rossatthehelm@gmail.com or by telephone at 519-216-4194.