

Windsor Port Authority

Outreach Campaign with Olde Sandwich Towne

The Windsor Port Authority has recently relocated its head offices in 2013 into a new community in the Windsor area. While industrial port operations have existed in the area for several years, integration with the community is essential for the continued viability and sustainable operations of the Port Authority. This Outreach Campaign has proven to be both effective and beneficial for the Port and the Community.

1. Project Challenges and Opportunities

The Town of Sandwich, which is now part of the municipality of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, is one of the oldest European settlements in the Upper Great Lakes basin. Sandwich is located immediately across the Detroit River from Detroit, Michigan, and its history as a port dates back to the 1600s when it was an integral part of the Great Lakes' fur trade. Most of the current port operations are now located in Sandwich, as is the office of the Windsor Port Authority. Over most of the 20th century, as the City of Windsor and the outlying suburbs developed and expanded, the old town of Sandwich suffered what is often referred to as "urban decay" and despite its long history became one of the most economically challenged areas within the City. The presence of significant port operations on the waterfront abutting Sandwich and major industrial

development less than one mile across the river in Detroit, Michigan also created issues of perception and identity.

Throughout the 1990s and continuing into the 21st century, Sandwich and its residents have committed to re-building the community and a renaissance of commercial and residential developments and up-grading has been occurring. As the most historically significant neighbourhood in Windsor, the area has re-branded itself as “Olde Sandwich Towne.” As often happens when neighbourhoods adjacent to port operations become more gentrified, friction and conflicting land uses have developed and the Windsor Port Authority came under increasing pressure to either minimize port operations in the area or relocate them out of the neighbourhood. This was impossible from both an economic and a logistics perspective as there were insufficient alternative waterfront locations available in the area and regardless the cost of relocation would have been prohibitive. So the challenge became to convince the community that the port industry was a valued corporate presence and that the Windsor Port Authority was a leader in environmental stewardship of the Detroit River and a positive force for improving the quality of life in Olde Sandwich Towne. If this could be achieved, the opportunity which arose was that the community and community leaders could become advocates, as opposed to opponents, for current and future port operations as well as for the Port Authority in its relationships with the broader region of Windsor and Essex County. It was decided that from an internal perspective, the achievement of these goals would require the dedication of a greater proportion of both the human and financial resources of the Port Authority going forward.

2. Organization's Mission and Communication Objectives

The Mission of the Windsor Port Authority is as follows:-

“The Windsor Port Authority will manage, develop and promote the lands and businesses of the Port of Windsor to fulfil its mandate as a Federal agency incorporated under the provisions of the Canada Marine Act, while supporting established standards of safety, security and environmental stewardship.”

It was felt that to continue to progress with its mission of port development, it would be necessary to better communicate the community contributions and economic importance of the port industry to Sandwich and the greater region. This, in turn, would secure the tenure of existing industries and hopefully assist in future discussions about bringing new or expanded port opportunities to the community.

It was also felt that the Port Authority and its tenants needed to be more proactive in their environmental stewardship activities to clearly demonstrate their value as corporate citizens and that this leadership needed to be clearly and effectively communicated to the community.

3. Communications Planning and Programming Components

The primary goal of the related projects undertaken was to establish the Port Authority as a valued corporate citizen within the Olde Sandwich Towne community and an environmental leader in its stewardship of the Detroit River. It was decided that a multi-

pronged campaign would be necessary to achieve these goals and to communicate its success to our target audiences.

(i) Research

It was agreed that in order to determine the appropriate activities to achieve our established goals, we should reach out to the local community we hoped to impact. Once this was done, we intended to “match-up” their suggestions with what we deemed attainable objectives given our financial resources and available properties. Input was solicited from the following parties:

- Olde Sandwich Towne Business Improvement area
- Councillor for the Ward – John Elliott
- Local businesses
- Port Users and Tenants in the area

We specifically needed to discuss what tenant properties were available for greening and other environmental initiatives and what additional properties may be available for acquisition by the Port Authority.

(ii) Communication Objectives

The projects objectives were as follows

- Identify appropriate environmental, community and sponsorship activities
- Work with local community and port users to complete identified activities
- Retain a communications and public relations consultant to assist in formatting messaging and undertaking the most effective communication activities

- Educate the community about the economic advantages of the port industry, its excellent record of environmental stewardship of the Detroit River and its leadership in environmental and community initiatives

(ii) Target Audience

Primary Audience – Olde Sandwich Towne

Secondary Audience – Greater Windsor and Essex County

Tertiary – Levels of Government (Municipal, Provincial and Federal) and Media

4. Action Taken and Communications

After discussions with local stakeholders, including port tenants, it was determined that the following actions would be undertaken:-

- In conjunction with 2 tenants who were planning major shoreline work, created over 1200 linear feet of new fish habitat after consultation with local conservation authority
- Developed a derelict Port Authority dock into public space, including green space, a fishing pier and significant fish habitat
- Purchased a large vacant lot adjacent to the Port Authority's office to be developed into an "outdoor museum" – green space with walking paths and numerous story boards detailing the history, current status, and economic activity generated by the port. The project is on-going with the lands having been purchased; design phase with significant public input is on-going.
- Identified strategic donations to the community to enhance public awareness

- Staff increased local speaking engagements with specific emphasis on economic activity generated by port, environmental stewardship and community giving
- Port staff worked with local youth groups on numerous clean-up projects of vacant properties within the port for environmental and aesthetic purposes and to increase public use of the waterfront
- New website, twitter and facebook accounts, and on-line newsletter developed and launched with emphasis on enhancing knowledge and public appreciation of the port

5. Communications Outcome and Evaluation

A great deal of the input received relative to the initiatives undertaken is anecdotal in nature. However, we do believe that the initiatives undertaken to date and which are on-going have generated significant community awareness and better appreciation for the Port Authority and its tenants:

- One of the port's tenants received an environmental achievement award from the Essex Region Conservation Authority for the extensive fish habitat created
- Public perception of the Windsor Port Authority in Olde Sandwich Towne has significantly improved to the point where the Port Authority is seen as a valued corporate citizen and no longer a negative influence on the community

- Activists and community fundraisers now look to the Port Authority as a leader in championing their activities; this, in turn has led to a changing perception of the Port Authority in the community-at-large
- Although no specific metrics are available, visits to the Port Authority's new website have increased significantly and we now have 400 regular readers of our on-line newsletter
- Appreciation of the importance of the port as an economic catalyst by community leaders has increased significantly; for example, during a recent environmental incident at a port facility, the local councillor praised the operator for their community involvement and excellent environmental record

As noted, this campaign is on-going but the results to date have been very positive and the Board has committed to continuing and increasing our activities in the future. Public opinion, particularly in Olde Sandwich Towne, has changed significantly and the Port Authority is now looked on as a major contributor to the quality of life in the community.