



**Email of January 11, 2021 from Doug Robertson:**

**RE: Digital Service Squad members available and new Government Funded Programs to help Local Businesses**

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Dear Merrickville-Wolford Business Owner,

**Digital Main Street Program** - We are pleased to provide you with an update on the Digital Main Street Program and how local businesses are using it to go digital! As background, Digital Main Street (DMS) is a federal/provincial government and ON Business Improvement Area partnership program, which provides supports/tools/grants to help “mainstreet” businesses enhance their online presence and digital capabilities, <https://digitalmainstreet.ca/>. Under one of the DMS programs, we took part in a regional application for a grant to hire digital/technology experts (called Digital Service Squad members) to work one-on-one with local small businesses to help assess their digital needs and overcome technology challenges. The application was successful, a grant was approved, and Digital Service Squad members were hired through the project lead, United Counties of Leeds Grenville Economic Development Office. The regional partnership involved several communities and organizations including the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, Merrickville-Wolford & District Chamber of Commerce, Westport, Athens, Front of Young, Elizabethtown-Kitley and Rideau Lakes.

**The Digital Service Squad member in our area is Rebecca Bredin.** Rebecca has been working with many local businesses, and has provided the following update on the DMS program in Merrickville-Wolford:

*“As we begin to wind down the Digital Transformation Grant 2.0 process through the Digital Main Street program, we are seeing a lot of success in Merrickville-Wolford. A number of businesses have been approved so far, and the DSS continues to advocate for others. Some of these businesses have already received their funds, while others are eagerly awaiting theirs. It has been a very exciting time as we see new approvals each week.*

*Now that we’re facing a lockdown, the Digital Service Squad (DSS) is focusing on making the best of this situation. We are currently scheduling Zoom meetings with business owners interested in learning more about their online presence, and offering digital audits which provide feedback on things like their website, Facebook or Instagram presence. During these meetings, we’re promoting the idea of using this time to learn new digital media skills or develop their online brand further. This can be as simple as making sure they’ve claimed their business through Google My Business, or as detailed as rearranging a website to be more user friendly. No matter what time commitment businesses are ready to make, the DSS is ready to help businesses get started and guide them in the right direction.*

*If you’re interested in learning more about the DSS and receiving a digital media audit, please feel free to reach out to Rebecca at [rebecca.bredin@uclg.on.ca](mailto:rebecca.bredin@uclg.on.ca) for more information. And don’t forget that if your business has heard back from the Digital Transformation Grant, make sure you return your signed paperwork immediately!”*

**Valley Eats Food Delivery Service Coming Soon** – Local restaurants, food businesses and anyone who orders local take-out will be interested in Valley Eats food delivery service and App, soon to be offered in Merrickville-Wolford. The Valley Eats App puts a local spin on third-party food delivery services by letting you choose options like delivery and pre-order for pick up from local restaurants, all from your phone. For restaurants/food business partners, the App brings a collaborative model and additional way to reach customers. Our local Community Futures Development Corporation will be covering on-boarding costs of \$500/business plus marketing and promotional products for a limited number of local restaurants/businesses. More information can be found here: <https://www.valleyeats.ca/>

**New Funding for Tourism Businesses - Grants Available as part of COVID-19 Tourism Adaptation Fund** - Regional Tourism Organization 9 (RTO 9) received funding from the Federal Government (FedDev) - COVID 19 Tourism Adaptation Fund to administer the funding and distribute it to tourism-related businesses including eligible businesses in Merrickville-Wolford. Eligible costs for the grant can go back to June 1, 2020 and include health and safety protocol (e.g., signage, cleaning supplies, plexi-glass partitions), alterations to accommodate distancing (e.g., expansion of patio space, acquisition of equipment such as outdoor heaters), digital tools (e.g., contactless check-ins and payment) and more. Application intake is open until February 15, 2021 at 4:00 pm. Grants are available from \$1,500.00 - \$20,000.00 maximum, and applicants need to have a matching cash contribution of 20%. The grant will cover 80% of eligible costs excluding HST. This is a first come first serve program, and you are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Eligible Tourism Businesses include Accommodation, Recreation & Entertainment, Food & Beverage Services, Travel Services, and Transportation. Retail stores heavily dependent on tourism may also be considered. All applications will be reviewed by a committee, where final approval will be decided. One-time adaptation and re-opening costs incurred between June 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 by a registered business will be considered. Costs incurred prior to application require receipts to be submitted and costs going forward will require approval prior to cost being incurred. More information and application details can be found here: <https://tourismtalk.ca/partnerships/partnership-funding/covid-19-tourism-adaptation-fund/>

## **Small Business Advisory Centre (SBAC) Announces New Funding & Programming**

– In partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation & Trade, the SBAC has received funds to help small businesses with customized coaching and training. The Virtual Business Advisory program is set to be launched by end of this month, where business owners can have access to, at no charge, experts and mentors in a wide range of business topics including Human Resources, Accounting/Bookkeeping, Legal, Marketing and more. Reach out to Cindy James, Manager of the SBAC, at [cjames@smallbizcentre.ca](mailto:cjames@smallbizcentre.ca) and keep an eye on the SBAC website <https://smallbizcentre.ca/> for new and upcoming workshops and seminars.

We hope small businesses can benefit from our local Digital Service Squad and the new programs and services being announced, particularly at this time when many are managing through COVID, adapting business models and working toward increasing sales with new technologies and digital approaches. If you have questions about digital transformations for your business or any of the noted government funding programs, please feel free to contact our Economic Development Officer at [edo@merrickville-wolford.ca](mailto:edo@merrickville-wolford.ca)

Doug Robertson  
CAO/Clerk/Director, Economic Development  
Village of Merrickville-Wolford



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