**Best in the West Awards 2021 – A Celebration of Excellence**
**Award Nomination**

**Entrant Name:** Teri James, Executive Director

**BIA Name:** Downtown Langley Business Association

**Title of Entry:** Downtown Dollars Program

**Category:** Marketing

**Timeframe of Project:** Ongoing

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**Opportunity / Need:**

The Downtown Dollar program began in 2012 as a marketing tool targeted towards visitors to Langley City. Hotel guests at a Langley City hotel were given $25 in gift certificates that were redeemable at 12 businesses located in downtown Langley to encourage them to support our local businesses while they were visiting the area.

The initial program was well received by visitors and participating businesses, and it uncovered a previously unseen opportunity to market the businesses in our BIA on a wide scale by making Downtown Dollars available to the public and redeemable at multiple participating locations.

Shortly after the launch of this program in 2012 we rebranded it as our Downtown Dollars program and over the past 8 years we have grown it into our most successful marketing campaign. With over 100 participating businesses, Downtown Dollars are appealing to a wide audience and have generated a lot of attention from our community, local businesses and surrounding BIAs. Our Downtown Dollars play a double role in our marketing strategy as we also use them as incentives for a vast array of contests, prizes, events and community donations.

The brilliance of this marketing campaign is the simplicity of it. One Downtown Dollar is equivalent to $1, and participating businesses are reimbursed for 100% of the Downtown Dollars they redeem. As a result, every dollar purchased or given away in Downtown Dollars goes right back into the businesses located in the Downtown Langley Business Association area, and feedback from participating businesses has been that the majority of customers spend much more than just the Downtown Dollars they had in hand.

**Audience:**

The primary audience for Downtown Dollars are:

- The citizens of Langley City and of our neighbouring communities of Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley
- Existing businesses as well as potential businesses who are considering a location in our BIA.

**Goal / Objectives:**

- Create an enticing gift certificate marketing piece with value to both the customer and the DLBA businesses.
- Design a program that is simple for both the customer and the businesses to participate in, and that would benefit the BIA area as a whole.

**Implementation:**

The Downtown Dollar program began in 2012, when our Executive Director Teri James overheard visitors staying at a local hotel being directed to a shopping area outside the downtown core, even though the businesses located in downtown Langley were a closer option with a great variety of restaurants, retail and services to meet visitor's

needs. As a response to this, the DLBA created the 'Hotel Certificate Program' and hotel guests were provided with $25 in gift certificates called Downtown Dollars which were redeemable at 12 businesses located in downtown Langley, with the goal to draw them into the downtown area while they were in town.

This program was well received by visitors and businesses, and it uncovered a previously unseen opportunity to market the businesses in our BIA on a wide scale by offering gift certificates that would be redeemable at multiple participating locations.

The program was re-branded as 'Downtown Dollars' and over the past 8 years we have developed it into one of our most successful marketing campaigns to date.

<u>What are Downtown Dollars?</u>

- Downtown Dollars are DLBA branded gift certificates that can be redeemed at over 100 participating businesses located in our BIA.
- $1 Downtown Dollar = $1 Canadian Dollar.
- Downtown Dollars are available in $5 and $10 increments (prior to 2020 they were available in $9 and $4 increments).
- Participating businesses are reimbursed by the DLBA for 100% for the Downtown Dollars redeemed at their location.

It was in 2018 that the program really hit its stride. By this time, we had over 70 participating businesses and we had streamlined the registration process to make it simple for businesses to register and participate:

- One time $25 commitment fee paid to the DLBA by the participating business
    - Businesses would be provided with a sign for their window to advertise they were a location where Downtown Dollars could be redeemed.
    - Nominal fee covered cost to update marketing materials and time to provide training to new businesses.
- Upon registering, businesses agreed to train their staff on the Downtown Dollars, how to accept them from customers and how to redeem them with the DLBA.
    - We learned that it was important that businesses take their role as a redeeming location seriously to avoid any negative experiences for customers when they redeem their Downtown Dollars. Placing importance on this has earned the program a good reputation in our community.

As the momentum behind this program continued to build, it became clear that Downtown Dollars were appealing to a wide audience and we saw a great opportunity to expand the program. We enhanced the Downtown Dollar program further by using them as incentives to promote our DLBA hosted events and our social media channels.

Downtown Dollars are now woven into every event we host in our DLBA. Here are just a few examples of how we use Downtown Dollars to promote our events:

- **Fork & Finger Event**: Customers support our local restaurants and in turn they can enter our draw. During this event we give away over $1000 Downtown Dollars.

- **Ain't It Grand Event**: Customers use their receipts from participating retail locations as entry forms. We do two Grand Prize draws for $1000 Downtown Dollars during this event.

- **McBurney Plaza Summer Series**: Live entertainment events that take place throughout the summer months. We give away $100 - $250 Downtown Dollar prizes to audience members who are pulled up on to stage, as trivia prizes during intermissions, and during draws for events that require registration.

- **Social Media Contests**: Downtown Dollars given away weekly for various contests including sharing event marketing, asking for followers to tag friends/family or mention their favorite DLBA business etc.

In 2020 we gave away over $30,000 in Downtown Dollars within our own marketing campaigns to support events or to increase social media reach. Not only do those dollars go right back into the pockets of our participating DLBA businesses, but businesses have shared that customers regularly spend an additional $1 for every $1 Downtown Dollar they redeem.

Our Downtown Dollars Program has grown into a very successful two-pronged marketing campaign:

- Downtown Dollars are an enticing, versatile gift certificate of great value that can compete with big box stores and the local mall. This was proven in 2020 when we sold over $12,000 in Downtown Dollars directly to customers.

- Downtown Dollars are a valuable marketing tool that we use as incentives to generate a further reach on social media and to promote our DLBA hosted events. In 2020 we gave away over $30,000 in Downtown Dollars and over $12,000 were purchased.

It is estimated that the $42,000 in Downtown Dollars put into circulation in 2020 will generate over $70,000 in spending at businesses located in downtown Langley based on feedback we have received from participating businesses.

Other unique features of our Downtown Dollar program include:

- The DLBA covers the cost to print and administer Downtown Dollars at no further cost to the businesses once they have paid their one time $25 registration fee.
- All Downtown Dollars have a serial number, and we track the disbursement and reimbursement of every Downtown Dollar to preserve the integrity of the program.
    - Downtown Dollars inventory is audited annually and audited in-house monthly
- Businesses have been trained on a specific reimbursement process that ensures Downtown Dollars are kept in pristine condition whenever possible. This enables us to recirculate Downtown Dollars which saves on the program costs and helps to protect our environment.
- We have had several other BIAs contact us about our Downtown Dollar program and we continue to be helpful and forthcoming with information for best practices for how to implement a similar program in other BIAs.
- In 2020 the DLBA was successful in partnering with the City of Langley to arrange for $50 Downtown Dollars per City staff member to be given as a year end acknowledgement in lieu of a holiday party.

**Results:**

- Downtown Dollar Stats for 2020 (our most successful year to date):
    - Over $12,000 in Downtown Dollars were purchased by customers from the DLBA office.
    - Over $30,000 Downtown Dollars were given away in DLBA sponsored marketing campaigns.
    - That is $42,000 Downtown Dollars that will be put back into the pockets of participating businesses, and we anticipate that these amounts will an estimated $70,000 + of spending as they are redeemed.
- To date, over $100,000 Downtown Dollars have been distributed.
- We have a 97.3% return rate for Downtown Dollars, proving that they are valuable to those who receive them and the process to redeem is simple for both the business and the customer.

Messages of appreciation from our participating businesses:

- **Sonya Perkins, Owner of Forever Yours Lingerie***:*

  *"As one of the longest standing business in downtown Langley, ours was one of the first businesses to sign up for this program. The initial intent was to rival gift cards that could be purchased in the various big box outlets and local malls. Over the years this program has grown to the extent that our downtown dollars can now be purchased on-line and are distributed throughout the year at events, social functions and I myself have even purchased them as gifts for my staff. They encourage supporting local and the reimbursement process is seamless. I think this is an amazing program and I am more than happy to continue to support it."*

- **Arnold Tobler, Owner of Farm Country Brewing:**
  *"Farm Country Brewing is excited to be involved in the DLBA's Downtown Dollars Program. The Downtown Dollars Program is so great and a win-win for everyone involved! Not only does this program encourage supporting local, but as a business owner, we are reimbursed 100% when we turn them in to the DLBA office. The simplicity of the Downtown Dollars Program is the real beauty of it. It is easy for both the consumer to understand and businesses to utilize. This is a very well though-out and a very well run program and we can say first hand that Farm Country Brewing has benefitted greatly by being a participating business in this program. We hope this is an initiative that the DLBA continues well into the future!"*

Messages of appreciation from our community:

- **Winnie from @fatpantsforever**
  *"The Downtown Langley Dollars is a great program to elevate the economic state in our community! I know the program has existed for quite some time, but 2020 really threw us a curveball. With the help of this program, and the proactiveness of the Downtown Langley Business Association, local businesses were able to thrive through the pandemic. I especially love the fact that 100% of the profit goes dollar for dollar back to the businesses, and that I could use it at over 100 locations in Downtown Langley. Shopping with DT Dollars is a breeze, and it also feels good to be supporting some of my favourite places during these challenging times".*

**Project Costs:**

Due to the nature of the Downtown Dollar program, we are not able to provide a year over year breakdown of costs associated to this program. The Downtown Dollar program involves the design and purchase of Downtown Dollar certificates that are kept in circulation as long as they remain in pristine condition, and costs range year over year. For example, in 2020 we purchased a large supply of Downtown Dollars, and this supply of Downtown Dollars will be in circulation for several years. In addition to this, Downtown Dollars have no expiry date, and can be redeemed in a different year than when they were issued.

We are able to provide an overview of costs associated with this project since its inception in 2012:

- Over $100,000 in Downtown Dollars have been distributed
  - $85,000+ given away as incentives
    - Businesses who redeem these are reimbursed 100% by the DLBA.
    - The DLBA annual budget includes costs to redeem Downtown Dollars given away within our marketing budget.
  - $15,000 purchased by customers
    - When Downtown Dollars are purchased, our overhead to reimburse the businesses ranges from $0 (when purchased direct from the office) to minimal service fees when purchased on-line. Recognising this, in 2020 we incorporated a dedicated page on our website where consumers are able to purchase them easily and efficiently.
- A total of $10,000 has been spent to print Downtown Dollars and posters for participating businesses.