



Mark Boushey, the third-generation owner of Boushey's Fruit Market, says Elgin Street does have problems he would like to see addressed, but still doesn't believe a BIA is the answer. *Darren Brown, OBJ*

Elgin Street businesses keeping it in the family

■ By Julie Fortier
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IT SEEMS STRANGE that one of Ottawa's most vibrant business areas doesn't have a business improvement area, but according to one business owner on Elgin Street, it all comes down to the old-fashioned concept of family-run businesses taking care of their own community.

"We don't have any vacancies on the street. If you look at Elgin Street, we don't have that collection of (large brand-name stores) like Bank Street has. It's just a different approach," explained Brian Karam, owner of MaLaren's pub and the Business Inn Hotel behind it. He is also president of the Elgin Area Property Owners Association and president of the Elgin Area Business Association.

Many of the businesses along Elgin Street are owned by a handful of families who have been there for generations, and they are very picky about who they lease their buildings to. The one area that does have a few fast food chains, where the old Elgin Theatre was located, is one of the few buildings on the street owned by an outside property manager.

"We have a very unusual situation on Elgin Street where people are into second, if not third and fourth generation and owner-occupied businesses," Mr. Karam said, who purchased his building 25 years ago. "That's the distinction between Elgin Street and Rideau

Street and Sparks Street and Bank Street. You don't find that pride of ownership, and that long-term thinking with people sinking money into their property."

Mark Boushey, of Boushey's Fruit Market on the corner of Waverley Avenue and Elgin, is one of those multi-generational families. His grandfather purchased the shop, along with a block of property from 326 to 350 Elgin, when he came to Ottawa in 1946. "I have been working here since I was 13 and it's always been full of great shops and restaurants. Elgin Street has just always been this way," explained Mr. Boushey.

He said in the past, there has been some talk on and off of forming a BIA. He would like to see action taken to address problems with the amount of customer parking in the area, pan-handlers and graffiti, but said there was no real desire from him or the other businesses to form a BIA.

The problems he cited are certainly not confined to Elgin Street. A recent proposal to have business owners clean up their own graffiti within a certain time frame is working its way through city council, Somerset Ward Coun. Diane Holmes told the *OBJ*, a process that includes input from the city's BIAs.

If Elgin Street had a BIA, they would be included in these discussions and would have an organized voice at city hall.

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The problem, or rather lack of a problem, she said, is Elgin Street is thriving without a BIA.

"BIAs tend to form when the neighbourhood is on the down side. They get together to fight a particular problem or promote business with flyers and sales. Businesses come together when they are struggling. Elgin Street is certainly not struggling by any means," she said.

Mr. Karam agreed that having a BIA would not suit the Elgin Street business and property owners for a variety of reasons.

"We see what the city has done on Sparks Street and the north end of Bank Street and Rideau Street. We prefer Elgin Street the way we have it right now," he said.

"I don't need to be dictated to on how to spend my money and how to improve the property and the street. We don't need to have meetings because we see each other all the time. I buy my groceries at Boushey's so I'm there at least five times a week."

BIAs are for situations where getting the businesses together is like "herding kittens," according to Mr. Karam.

"It's for areas where the owners don't really get along, they don't want to put money into (collaborative efforts) and you have to force them to. Here, we don't have that problem. We all talk to each other all the time, so why pay into a tax in order to do it?"

One issue the businesses are coming together

to tackle is a community plan to get rid of the troublemakers that put Elgin Street in the news for all the wrong reasons. Lately there have been attacks and even deaths stemming from the rowdy late-night crowds that the bustling night life on Elgin Street attracts.

"When someone is a troublemaker, you can kick them out. As a property owner, I can say I don't want him on my property any more, but then they just go into your neighbour's business and cause problems there," said Mr. Karam.

To combat this, the property owners are working with police to collectively ban troublemakers from all Elgin Street businesses. "They will be able to say to an undesirable person, 'You're just not allowed on the whole street.' It's a good example of community effort with police."

Rather than working in competition with each other, Mr. Karam said that they already work together to have changes made at city hall.

He gave the example of when Goldstein's IGA wanted to open on Sundays back when businesses outside tourist areas were prohibited from doing so. Boushey's Fruit Market, which was already open on Sundays, signed a petition to have Goldsteins stay open. "He did it notwithstanding the competition, because we are all neighbours. We have a very different approach. It is very informal and it is very friendly. And we all get along and we don't have any arguments ... Quite frankly, it's working." ■



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12:00-12:45: Lunch
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