



2024 YEAR-END REPORT

FOR THE TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHGATE



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Introduction

Staff and Board volunteers worked to produce deliverables for the Township of Southgate, agreed to as per a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Year 2 of amalgamation saw improved membership benefits and programming, changes to our office location (From Markdale to Flesherton), and new marketing and branding.

We expanded our newsletter reach to include the wider community, not only Chamber members and moved from a bi-weekly to a weekly publication. It receives, on average, a 50-60% open rate, which, in the world of newsletters, is huge. The newsletter is the best way to connect with members and the wider community, and we have realized improved member relations as a result.

In 2024 (September), in consultation with new Township Staff, the South Grey Chamber of Commerce entered into a revised MoU Agreement that focused on Southgate-specific reporting metrics and adjustments around specific events.

Per MOU Criteria:

The South Grey Chamber of Commerce has 3 Southgate members in organizational/event planning and governance positions.

The SGCC has 15 Business Chamber Members in the Southgate Area.

Participation of Southgate businesses in events is recorded with each overview of the event in the following report

Overview of Mission and 2024 Goals

A recognized voice of business committed to enhancing economic prosperity in the South Grey area is the mission of the South Grey Chamber of Commerce.

In 2024, the Chamber took further steps to improve membership recruitment and retention, improve the professional branding of the organization, relocate our office, update and expand recognition of who we are, and build out our existing systems to enhance communication with our members and the South Grey community.

Our team made a dedicated effort to take a more prominent place at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) table once again. Through our participation with the OCC, we have a strong voice in advocacy efforts for South Grey businesses at the provincial level.

We continued to build and improve our website, notably revamping the site map of “Explore South Grey.” This is our primary launching pad for tourism-related activities and deliverables under the MOU. We continue receiving positive feedback on the directory platform introduced to members last year. We have seen increased participation and more familiarity with the new software.

We expanded our strategic partnerships and introduced new opportunities and networking events. 2024 saw the hosting of the second amalgamated **Regional Business Awards, Home and Garden Show**, and community advocacy by hosting and running “**Breakfast/Coffee with the Mayor**” events.

MOU Initiatives and Outcomes

In 2024, the Chamber's MOU initiatives included:

- Business and Community Events
- Tourism Support & Services
- Strategic Business Development



1. BUSINESS & COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Chamber hosted the following regional business and community events as part of the MOU:

- **Annual Home & Garden Show**
- **Southgate Coffee with the Mayor**
- **South Grey Business Awards & Recognition event**
- **The Snap and Shop-** A social media contest that was open to all of South Grey and saw participation from Southgate.
- **Three Networking Events** for the South Grey Region - Including one in Dundalk
- **Hopeville Kite Festival**

Regional Annual Home and Garden Show

On the weekend of April 27th and 28th, the South Grey Chamber of Commerce hosted the **Regional Home and Garden Show** in Flesherton, utilizing the Arena Complex. The weekend was a success, with 47 exhibitors and an estimated 1800 individuals attending the 2-day event.

The Chamber sought to achieve these goals:

- Operate the show at a break-even financial level (or better)
- Offer a variety of exhibitors (to attract a variety of attendees), setting the foundation to draw more attendees, attract big-name speakers
- Attract over 1,800 attendees [2023: 2000 goal; 1800-2000 actual] (to make the show worthwhile for the exhibitors), setting the foundation to draw more exhibitors and an equally varied group of speakers

- These goals were met or exceeded, with further tourism-related objectives met, with many of the attendees being from out of town. (Upon entry, we collected demographic information through a door prize ballot system.)

The SGCC presented a speaker series on stage for the weekend, which covered a variety of topics related to home and garden.

The show supported community partnerships:

- Regional food banks benefited from free exhibitor space at the front door for the collection of donations (advertised ahead of the show).
- The Grey Highlands Fire Dept attended the show with a large truck and fire safety information.
- OPP attended the show
- We provided a range of non-profit organizations with free space.

SOUTHGATE BUSINESSES/ ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING AS VENDORS: 4

AS VOLUNTEERS: 1

VISITED AS GUESTS: Out of a sample size of 511 visitors over the 2 days (those that choose to enter the door prize draw) **8.6% identified being from the Township of Southgate.** Total Attendance was measured at approx. 1800 visitors.

Southgate Coffee with the Mayor

The Southgate Coffee with the Mayor event is a collaboration between Chamber and Township Staff. The event was hosted Nov. 5, 2024 and included a new format from 2023, with a presentation from Senior Manager of Development & Community Services, Ken Melanson, about upcoming growth in Dundalk and how it impacts businesses.

SOUTHGATE BUSINESSES IN ATTENDANCE: 24

South Grey Business Awards & Recognition Event

The 2023 Business Awards Gala occurred in Walters Falls, as Chatsworth was Hosting.

We served a total of 80 plates at Walters Falls Inn & Spa. Our keynote speaker was Monica Singh Soares of Life Directions Employment Supports, who spoke on the 'Light it Up for ODEN' campaign.

Awards were presented to business winners, decided on by a new public voting system online. Winners from each municipality took home awards in various categories, including:

- Business of the Year
- New Business of the Year
- Tourism Business of the Year
- Agri-Business of the Year
- Non-Profit Excellence
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Volunteer of the Year (1 per municipality represented)

The SGCC held a silent auction to offset costs and featured products and services across the region.

The awards were a successful event, and we are proud to recognize local business excellence. The full Business Awards & Recognition Gala report is available by contacting the Chamber Office at 519-986-4612 or events.southgreychamber@gmail.com.

Southgate Businesses Involved

SOUTHGATE AWARD NOMINEES: 6

SOUTHGATE VOLUNTEERS: 1

South Grey Snap and Shop

The Snap and Shop was an optional online campaign where businesses could take advantage of our marketing investment in a shop local campaign and encourage customers to share images of them making a purchase or using a service. The customer would tag the business and the Chamber in this social media post and get entered into a weekly draw for prizes donated by participating businesses. The Chamber bought Ad-buys and paid for promotion.

The event had the following primary objectives:

- Communicate the message that South Grey is "Open for Business"
- Promote Shopping Local
- Inspire Community Participation

Networking Events- Building Local Supply Chains

The Chamber of Commerce and its Membership Committee, made up of businesses from around the region, created and co-hosted 3 networking events in South Grey. These events are designed to promote member-to-member (also open to the public) networking. Local businesses learn and make connections that strengthen the local economy when they meet.

- **Networking Event Hosted by Pure Music Garlic, Boars Rock Farm, Hillary Breadner Graphics and Markdale Flowers.** This event included a garlic farm tour and information about the hosts plus great networking with approx 28 businesses in attendance. (Rocklyn).

- **Networking Event Hosted by Life Directions Employment Supports, South East Grey Support Services, and Markdale Foodland.** This event included information about the non-profit hosts, the MentorAbility Program and Mentor Awards. Approximately 24 businesses attended (Flesherton).
- **Networking Event Hosted by Edgewood Suites-** Included a Senior Advisory Speakers Panel, titled “Unlocking the Power of the 55+ Demographic for your Business” Approx 23 businesses attended (Dundalk).

Hopeville Kite Festival

Event Committee:

Darrol Belin (Southgate Member- Old Blacksmith's Studio)

Jane Bakewell (Southgate Member- Old Blacksmith's Studio)

Monica Singh Soares (Southgate Member- Rise Up and Soar)

Karen Cox- Chamber President

Barbara Dobreen- Southgate Deputy Mayor

Dave Meslin- Event Coordinator/ Co-Chair

Margot Byers- Secretary

Event Summary

The 2024 Kite Festival was organized by the South Grey Chamber of Commerce, Township of Southgate volunteers, and Dave Meslin as part of the 2024-2025 Memorandum of Understanding between the SGCC and Township.

The event occurred over the two days of August 24th and 25th, 2024. The very well-attended event included professional kite fliers, food vendors, craft and business vendors, and children's activities. The 2024 festival was also considered successful in promoting tourism efforts in Southgate.

In 2024, the Chamber of Commerce secured a grant through RT07, which included funding and support for an online marketing campaign for the event.

Through successful marketing strategies, the 2024 Kite Festival exceeded attendance expectations. Volunteers used counters to measure **2,900** people through the gates over the 2 days.

Using the collection of draw ballots, we deduced a summary of attendees at the festival.

- 33% of attendees travelled at least 1 hour to attend the show
- Approx. 29% self identified as 50+ years of age *

* The SGCC also compiled data for the festival from door prize ballots to gauge a snapshot of those who attended. Not all attendees filled out a ballot. The % was applied to the total number of counted visitors and should be considered estimates.

Event Goals

- Operate event with profit to support 2025 Festival improvements
- Promote Southgate tourism
- Grow the event from last year

Southgate Members Involved in Planning/ Management: 3 + Deputy Mayor

Southgate Businesses Participating: 7

Southgate Resident Attendance: 464

Event Highlights

The Kite Festival included professional Kite fliers from across Ontario, Quebec, and several from the United States

On Saturday, the winds were higher, enabling the kites to fly better. As a result, we had higher visitor numbers that day. Sunday had very low winds, and there were fewer visitors that day.

Food vendors and business members created a market square feel, with food from various backgrounds and cultures.

Vendors Who Attended:

EdgeWood Suites (Southgate Member)

K-W Flags (Shelburne)

Yogi's Leather Shop (Southgate)

Country Road Freeze Dried Foods

PJ Knickerbockers (Grey Highlands Member)

Food Vendors Who Attended:

Spanky's Food Truck (Southgate Member)

Nella's Caribbean Grocery store (Southgate Business)

Finiti Seafood Depot (Shelburne)



2. TOURISM SERVICES

The Chamber provided the following tourism services, as per the MOU:

- Distributing tourism business brochures throughout the Municipality and promoting the South Grey area through other media means.
- Further investment in a tourism-focused app/web presence to support visitation to South Grey

Distributing Tourism Business Brochures Throughout the Municipality

The Chamber office in Flesherton offers a variety of tourism brochures from Grey Highlands, West Grey, Southgate, Chatsworth, Grey County, and Bruce County; it is open for tourism information throughout the week.

The relocation to Flesherton was a cost-saving effort, but also dramatically improved the office's appearance.

The new location in the heart of the town has meant that walk-in traffic is up significantly, with an average of 30 visits per month in the first 2 months after opening. Almost all the public members who walked in sought tourism-related information about the area.

Chamber staff/ strategic partners provided tourism-related information at every event we hosted, highlighting tourism-related businesses, maps and experiences/walking tours.

2024 saw the delayed creation of the Tourism Committee, composed of member businesses. In 2025, we will see the work of this committee get started, with the first

meeting to establish a chair. The committee's efforts will focus on tourism infrastructure, with the first main focus on updating the website and launching a brand new app to promote tourism in the area.

Investigating a Tourism-Focused App to Support Visitation to Southgate

The Chamber has laid the foundation and started to build a tourism-related app for South Grey. Work continues, with several useful upgrades built into the website's site map. A comprehensive business directory will enable a smooth transition over to the app interface. The app will be launched publicly and heavily promoted in the Spring/Summer of 2025.

A Year in Review and a Look Ahead

The Chamber is excited about our accomplishments in 2024 and looks forward to improving our efforts to benefit the business community in 2025.

On top of everything noted in this report, the South Grey Chamber participated in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Day at Queen's Park for the second consecutive year.

This event puts representatives of Ontario Chambers in a room with provincial decision-makers. We look forward to doing this again in 2025.

2024 also saw increased participation in the Ontario Economic Report, to be published in 2025. Our members were encouraged to participate in a survey for the report. Their answers will populate the regional section for South Grey in the report. The report informs policy decisions at the provincial level and is available to Municipal Partners.

The SGCC also made concerted efforts to expand our services into the new regions that joined after amalgamation. The focus was on business communities that will grow with the former West Grey/ Grey Highlands Chamber. A strong focus and additional work will be carried out in these communities throughout 2025. We expect meet-and-greets and network-style events to start again in March or April.