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THE HOMETOWN ADVANTAGE

'Buy Local Study' to focus on local economic growth

By TRACI DUTTON LUDWIG

The Scarsdale Chamber of Commerce knows that sometimes it really does take a village. "A rising tide lifts all boats" was the overriding motto at last week's chamber meeting, Tuesday, Nov. 19, at Vintology on Palmer Avenue. Featured speakers Jane Veron and Lisa Tretler, co-founders of The Acceleration Project (TAP), discussed plans to promote the vibrancy of Scarsdale's retail and dining hubs and local service providers. TAP is a nonprofit organization that deploys professional women to assist local small businesses with strategic and tactical advice. The organization's focus is to provide well-structured, accessible, results-oriented programming to enable small businesses to flourish. Both Veron and Tretler are Scarsdale residents.

Dubbed the "Buy Local Study," TAP's project represents a collaboration of research and development. Its goals are to energize consumer motivation locally and to identify consumers' needs and preferences. Springboarding from extended dialogue among TAP professionals and local business owners, this project is intended to support economic goals and hone special community relationships.

"From conversations with local small businesses, we became increasingly aware that Scarsdale's retailers and service providers have never before faced so many challenges. We realized there was a need to work collectively to find innovative ways to attract customers and to build loyalty to local businesses," said Veron.

Specifically, business vitality is currently challenged by intense competition from the Internet and from national and retail chains that sell by price. However, important subjective variables also play a role, such as shifts in buyer behavior, shopping and spending practices, and the impact of parking constraints in the village.

As business owners struggle independently to address common concerns, a potent opportunity for collaboration was born. "We strongly believe in the concept of local professionals helping local businesses. We have common goals in seeing Scarsdale's business centers succeed because thriving retail centers have a positive impact on the entire community," Tretler said.

In cooperation with the Scarsdale Chamber of Commerce, TAP's first step has been



Lisa Tretler and Jane Veron

to initiate conversation among the stakeholders — business and restaurant owners, service professionals, consumers and village officials — to accelerate the process for change. "We see enormous potential in leveraging local talent to accelerate economic growth. We all care deeply about the vibrancy of our community," Tretler said.

The Buy Local Study aims to collect feedback through conversation and brainstorming with business owners and customers, an online survey, focus groups and research into effective strategies in other communities. This information will be synthesized into practical recommendations about consumers' needs and preferences. As a result, attention will be focused on reorienting buyer mindset and behavior. This will encourage patronage of Scarsdale businesses and local service providers, stimulate customer loyalty and increase volume — as well as educate stakeholders on their role in cultivating vibrancy in retail hubs.

"Individual success elevates the entire community. Thriving retail centers make Scarsdale an attractive place to live, work and eat and shop. But they also offer more than that ... We all desire a sense of community, and the retail hubs provide a central meeting place," Veron said.

In addition to gleaning insight from multiple perspectives, TAP's own perspective is significant. "TAP consultants are all Scarsdale residents," Veron noted. "They are, in fact, the very customers who shop and use the services of the businesses we are helping. Our consultants bring not only top-notch knowledge of the issues facing small business owners, but

also a vested interest in maintaining the vitality of our community."

Tretler has more than 20 years' experience in strategic marketing and consulting. She is the owner of a consulting firm specializing in business plan development, trend analysis, goal setting and marketing and growth strategies for both established businesses and start-ups. She has worked in managerial roles focused on business strategy at large firms such as American Express, Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), Kurt Salmon Associates and Towers Perrin. She has been a member of the faculty at the Wharton School of Business, and she has taught a course in entrepreneurial marketing in affiliation with the Women's Enterprise Development Center in White Plains.

Veron's qualifications include an M.B.A. with honors from Harvard University, followed by extensive professional experience as a strategy consultant and marketing executive. As a consultant at Bain & Co., Veron has advised Fortune 500 clients and provided strategic guidance across a variety of industries. As a marketing executive at American Express, she designed and implemented successful marketing plans, championed new product introductions and achieved best-in-class economics through process redesign.

She is currently the principal of a private consulting business, and she has an impressive roster of leadership roles in the public and nonprofit sectors. These include chairing the Scarsdale Planning Board, serving as president of the League of Women Voters and leading the Fox Meadow Neighborhood Association. She was also elected chairman of the consortium of 16 neighborhood associations (SNAP), and she has worked on the executive committee of Scarsdale § Edgemont Family Counseling Service. In recognition of her sustained and significant impact on the community, Veron received the Mayor's Award for exceptional leadership in 2007.

TAP's Buy Local Study online survey is estimated to launch in January. An analysis of results will be presented in summer. Information about participation, and a link to the survey, will be disseminated through local media outlets and on TAP's website (www.theaccelerationproject.org). Focus groups will also be forming, and any interested residents are encouraged to request further information by email: info@theaccelerationproject.org.