

Luring The Young To Melville Firms

*Published: September 22, 2003
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There's only so much government can do without getting bogged down, which is why Ted Weiss is gathering some of his Melville corporate tenants this week to address, first with a modest effort and then with some broader strokes, many of the problems facing companies in his part of Route 110.

"What I decided was that there was enough planning, enough give and take between, say, the Town of Huntington and the Town of Babylon, where nothing really gets done," Weiss said in explaining why he is forming the Melville Executive Forum. According to a release, the forum is "an attempt to develop a core business community to address regional matters."

That sounds like a direct slap at groups such as the Route 110 Redevelopment Corp., on whose board Weiss sits, or Action Long Island. Both groups have focused attention on problems such as traffic congestion in the Route 110 corridor, of which Melville is a major part.

Weiss sees it differently. "We don't want it to seem that in any means we are looking to supercede their efforts, because they're doing a fine job," Weiss said. Instead, he is looking for a private- sector approach to a problem he does not see those groups addressing: attracting and keeping young professionals who would work in the buildings T. Weiss Realty owns. Weiss is hoping to convince his tenants to take part in an internship program he's developing with Adelphi University and maybe to move from there into looking into how to make Melville more enticing to young professionals.

"We talk at these monthly meetings [of the other groups] of the brain drain - people being sucked elsewhere," Weiss said, citing the example of his daughter, who attended Georgetown University and stayed there after graduation because of the opportunities. "We have to create a place where professionals want to be." He added, "I'm not waiting for a government agency to jump on board."

While Weiss did not view his effort as competition for the existing groups, and while Route 110 Redevelopment Corp. executive director Donald Middleton was supportive, Action Long Island president Sheldon Sackstein was somewhat concerned. "What you need to do is not necessarily form another group for every corner on 110," Sackstein said. "But anybody who wants to do something is best served by getting involved with groups that have a track record of accomplishment. ... I'd like to sit down and have a cup of coffee with him."

Open Expectations

Last year Elaine Thompson did very well with a poster of the Bethpage Black course that, while not the official U.S. Open design, still sold briskly even though she had to market it herself.

Thompson expects even greater results from her poster for the 2004 U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills, which this time is official. It is being sold by the United States Golf Association on its Web site and in its catalog and is to be on sale in the Open's merchandise tent.

Her efforts won't end with turning over the poster design. Thompson, who lives in Bohemia, said she is considered a vendor for the Open. She arranged for the printing, by the Plainview firm First Impressions Lithographic, and she had to order a tractor-trailer of cardboard tubes to stuff the posters into. She has to coordinate the shipment of the posters, in boxes of 50, to a Minnesota company that handles the distribution for the USGA. The effort should be worth her while: She hopes to sell 7,500 posters, which cost \$29 (\$25 for USGA members). Thompson can't sell the posters herself, but she hopes to pick up additional income framing the posters to match the 2002 ones people bought.

As for the artwork, in style it's similar to her Bethpage effort. The top third is a depiction of a famous hole (the 14th in the case of Shinnecock Hills), the middle third shows the clubhouse, circa 1892, and the bottom shows a golfer, who is supposed to be James Foulis, winner of the 1986 Open at Shinnecock. It's actually Foulis' head and the body of a friend of Thompson's, Ed Matthews, dressed up in period costume. "When they [the USGA] gave me photographs, they only gave me studio photographs," Thompson said. "I wanted an action shot." The jacket came from a thrift shop, the pants are rolled up to simulate knickers and the socks were Thompson's father's from the 1930s.

You can look at the poster now on the USGA's Web site, www.usga.org. Or you can wait until next June, when Thompson will be signing posters in the merchandise tent.

Market Aisles Come 'Round

It seemed like a good idea at the time: a new design for a supermarket to create a "market" effect, with a cafe at the entrance and large delicatessen, bakery and meat departments around the perimeter, with the aisles organized like spokes of a wheel. It was a novel enough concept that the King Kullen in Commack was featured in trade magazines as potentially the harbinger of supermarkets to come.

But about a month ago, helped along by a piece of equipment called an aisle mover (that can move 60 feet of an aisle, with the merchandise on it), workers began taking out the spokes and establishing a more traditional design of aisles in rows.

What happened? "We didn't truly realize until after we had opened the doors that it was a difficult store to shop once you got outside the perimeter of the store," said Joe Brown, vice president of sales and merchandising for the King Kullen Grocery Co. "We found customers missed part of the store in their shopping trip."

Company officials had a sense right from the beginning there was a problem, but they waited to see if customers would adjust. When it appeared to store employees that customers were not adjusting - and when a market research effort confirmed that customers were unhappy - company officials decided to make a change. The renovations are expected to be complete in a few weeks.

Is there a lesson to be learned for us all? "One of the things we do in our company to survive in a very competitive marketplace is listen to our customers," said Tom Cullen, another company vice president. Especially if it means they leave the store because they can't find a can of peas.