



Rahway Special Improvement District Report

Monday, May 13, 2024

I. SID Business Improvement Program –

- Forgivable loans for new and existing Rahway businesses for Interior Improvements, Signage and Brand Marketing/Design Services up to \$2,000 in each category.
- MBE Certified Businesses (Minority, Women, Veteran, LGBTQ) that has or gets the certification are eligible for additional \$1,000.

Update

- There were 130 applicants for the BIP. 109 businesses met the established criteria for eligibility. 62 businesses have submitted their funding requests.
- **UPDATE:** 40 of 62 businesses have completed all the steps and have received funding.

| Business | Business Address | Total |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| 2 World Studios | 1544 Irving St | \$5,000 |
| Arch Angels NJ LLC | 1600 St Georges Ave. | \$6,412 |
| Bongiovi Chiropractic Center | 764 Jefferson Ave | \$1,800 |
| Chicken Delight | 1685 St Georges Ave | \$3,647 |
| Coffee Box | 1465 Irving Street | \$4,290 |
| Compliments by A Myles | 156 East Milton Ave | \$6,973 |
| Cooks Kitchn | 1685 St Georges Ave | \$6,000 |
| Copacabana Coffee | 77 E. Milton Ave | \$3,970 |
| Cultured Expressions | 1417 Main St | \$2,907 |
| Darkside Industries | 1571 Irving St | \$3,822 |
| Dason Stainless Products | 1773 Elizabeth Ave | \$2,000 |
| Davis Financial Services | 1523 Irving Street | \$4,034 |
| Diamond Studio Lash & Brow | 1653 Irving St | \$6,000 |
| Dr. Gregg Schneider | 1271 Westfield Ave. | \$5,755 |
| Gigi's Latin Bistro | 1524 Irving St | \$2,000 |
| Hellhound Studios | 1605 Coach St | \$1,990 |
| Instile Stone Corp | 713 New Brunswick Ave | \$2,000 |
| La Chula Tex Mex | 78 E Cherry St | \$6,000 |
| La Malinche | 1588 Irving St | \$4,000 |
| Le Bijou Nail & Spa | 382 St Georges Ave | \$1,200 |
| Luxury Elite Wellness | 1567 Irving St | \$6,831 |
| Melao Cafe & Creamery | 1425 Irving St | \$5,058 |
| Michelino's Pizza | 79 E Milton Ave | \$2,000 |
| Millie & Joy | 1361 Franklin St | \$4,000 |
| MNM Fitness | 1521 Main St | \$4,880 |
| Nancy's Towne House | 1453 Main Street | \$4,980 |
| Navi Salon | 1673 Irving St | \$1,485 |
| Nutradontics | 1271 Westfield Ave. | \$2,000 |

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|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| PMU Studio | 1275 Westfield Ave, Ste 4 | \$4,000 |
| Protein Corner | 548 W. Grand Ave | \$2,000 |
| Pupz Club | 1419 Irving Street | \$5,865 |
| Quality 1st Auto Repair | 300 St Georges Ave | \$3,890 |
| Rahway Primary Care | 1531 Irving St | \$6,000 |
| Rahway Sushi | 75 E. Cherry St | \$2,000 |
| Sabor Peruano | 1576 Irving Street | \$7,000 |
| Santana Agency | 75 E Cherry St | \$2,697 |
| Spruce Industries | 759 E. Lincoln Avenue | \$2,000 |
| The Wannabees | 40 E Cherry St | \$2,903 |
| Vendee Events | 275 E Grand Ave | \$5,000 |
| Wet Ticket Brewing | 1435 Main St | \$4,000 |

II. Facade Improvement Program

- \$250,000 has been allocated for property owners to improve their exterior facades and storefronts as \$10,000 forgivable loans.

Update

- There was a total of 32 applicants for the FIP. 24 applicants met the established criteria for eligibility.
- 10 property owners are ready to receive funding and are working with SID and UCEDC to finalize paperwork.
- 4 property owners have completed the work and received funding.

III. RECAP: Women in Business Networking Event - Wednesday, March 27 from 6-8pm at Nancy's Townhouse

- WOMEN TALKING BUSINESS OVER PIZZA - A Casual Gathering About Serious Business
- The event was led and moderated by Jacqueline Lombardo and Sheryl Rosenstock from Wizdom Media with additional presentations from Karla Alvarez from SASS and Heidi Rosal-Loder from the Rahway Chamber of Commerce.
- This 2-hour meet-up/workshop focused on marketing with specifics on practical approaches like time blocking, task prioritization, automation tools, outsourcing non-core activities, and integrating marketing into daily routines.
- There will also be time for networking and opportunities to meet other women business owners.
- Over 40 women (and two men) were in attendance for this event.

IV. RECAP: Rahway Taste of Spring - April 5, 2024, from 5:30-9pm at the Rahway Rec Center

- Tickets were available through Eventbrite. Over 1,000 tickets were sold in less than 3 weeks.
- 42 eating and drinking establishments participated in the event, 30 of which are from Rahway. (the most Rahway restaurants in the 21 years of the event)
- This year in addition to all the restaurants and DJ inside the gym, we featured a craft beer tent with 4 local craft breweries and classic rock from the Sweater Pils and a dessert tent with coffee, gelato, and pastries and the sweet sounds of jazz from the Bradford Hayes Quartet.

- We enlisted 10 judges to taste and select winners in 8 different categories.

Judges

Jen Adona- @jerseygirltravels local lifestyle influencer
 Gary Gonzalez - Rahway's Own, Chopped Champion, owner and executive chef of newly opened Casa Calverna in Middletown
 Cyd Katz- @newjerseyisntboring, NJ events and community influencer
 Jenna Intersimone- writer for Home News Tribune and MyCentralJersey.com
 Sarah Kim- @exclusively_NJ- Nj food influencer
 Heidi Rosal- Rahway Chamber of Commerce President
 Karim Shamar-Basha- NJ.com food writer
 Lily Terhune- @thesaturdaylocal, Local food scene and small business influencer
 Maura Wright- @NJ_excellent_adventure, NJ food influencer

Taste of Spring 2024 Winners

Best Drink: Cholao El P'Tas (Rahway)
 Best Appetizer: Latin Fuego (Food Truck)
 Best Handheld Food: Casamon Caribbean Cuisine (Rahway)
 Best Vegetarian: Souped! (Rahway)
 Best Entrée: Gigi's Latin Bistro (Rahway) & Hugo's Peruvian Restaurant (Rahway)
 Best Dessert: Gigi's Latin Bistro (Rahway)
 Best Craft Beer: Wet Ticket Brewing (Rahway)
 Best of Taste: Latin Fuego (Food Truck)

- The Department of Recreation, Police Department, Fire Department, Department of Health, and Department of Public Works all worked together to coordinate the day of logistics to ensure another successful event.

**V. RECAP: Block Party – 1002 St. Georges Ave Parking Lot
 Thursday, May 2, 2024 from 5:30-7:30pm**

- In collaboration with the Department of Recreation, we worked with the property owners of the shopping center to bring the traditional “Block Party” in the park to the parking lot of 1002 St. Georges Ave.
- The event took place on the south side of the property in the parking lot in front of Ming Feng, Ana Style Salon, Gelber Associates, Shulton Barber Shop, and Plum Tomato.
- The Department of Recreation coordinated the DJ, carnival style games, stilt walkers, face painters, balloon sculptor and 360 Photobooth and provided staff for the event.
- The SID worked with the property management company, Gelber Associates to engage the 16 businesses located in the shopping center to be a part of the event.
- The SID sought to purchase food for the event from the local restaurants and shops, but many provided it to the community free of charge. Ming Feng provided egg rolls, Rahway Bagels supplied crumb cake, 7-11 had fresh baked goods, water and drinks, and Rahway Garden Farms had lots of fresh fruit for people to enjoy. Plum Tomato provided the party with pizza and garlic knots. By the end of the event, 30 pizzas were consumed by those in attendance, more than any of the other Block Party events.
- During the Block Party, Shulton Barber Shop was offering free hair cuts to kids under 11 and Anna Styles was offering free cuts and eyebrow waxing.
- Skaff's Corner Pharmacy, Northeast Spine & Sports Medicine, and Bank of America also set up tables with info and giveaways.

VI. NJ Art and Music Express – Saturday, May 4th

- This is a new event that Rahway is hosting in partnership with the Township of Woodbridge and sponsored by NJ TRANSIT.
- Each municipality will host a day of art and music events. Visitors will be able to ride NJ Transit for free between Rahway, Avenel, and Woodbridge stations to experience the art scene near each of them.
- NJ TRANSIT will assist in marketing the event through their social media and on digital screens at the stations along North Jersey Coast Line from Secaucus Junction south to Bay Head.
- Rahway's Schedule of Events:
 - Acoustic performances on Train Station Plaza to greet visitors arriving via the train from 10am-5pm.
 - NCNW Rahway Creates will have art on display at Rahway Rec Center, Rahway Library (10am-3pm), The Coffee Box (2-4pm) and Atelier Rosal Gallery (3-5pm).
 - E. Cherry Street Artisan Market (between Irving & Monroe St) from 11am-5pm featuring local vendors offering unique gifts, artwork, and handmade items.
 - Arts Park Mural Dedication and Artist Meet & Greet at Arts District Park at 12pm followed by a Drop in Art Making workshop with Laura Brown at 1pm.
 - The Gallery Space Exhibit: Between Extremes: An Exhibit of Black and White Artworks will have a preview reception from 12-3pm at the Rahway Senior Center.
 - In honor of Star Wars Day (May the 4th be with you), UCPAC Main Stage will have an open house event at 1pm featuring a live Wurlitzer organ performance of the iconic John Williams compositions followed by a movie screening of Rogue One: A Star Wars Story at 2pm.
 - Hamilton Stage will feature the Golden Gals Live 2pm and 7pm (ticketed show).

VII. Dinner & Show with UCPAC

- The Dinner and Show program that began in 2022 and continued in 2023 showed good results, but after discussions with UCPAC and our restaurants, we felt that building in some consistency would be to the benefit of all parties.
- **UPDATE:** Dinner & Show deals are now available at 10 participating restaurants every time there is UCPAC presented show at the Main Stage.
- Patrons just need to show their tickets at the time of ordering.
- Promotion for the program has begun at UCPAC and on their website, Train Station Plaza, as well as through email blasts and social media.
- Each participating restaurant has received signage for upcoming shows as well as signage highlighting their deals.
- Participating Restaurants: Cubanu, Gigi's Latin Bistro, La Chula, La Malinche, Luciano's, Moaaz Mediterranean Grill, Nancy's Townhouse, Sabor Peruano, The Lounge at Watt Hotel, The Waiting Room

VIII. Social Media & Branding Program

- The City of Rahway, in conjunction with the Rahway Special Improvement District, sponsored a Social Media and Branding Program to help businesses improve their current promotional practices while learning during the process. The program will be awarded to three businesses who will receive social media services, social media training and mentoring, as well as a strategic branding analysis and plan over a six-month period. Services will be carried out by the SID Social Media and Branding

Specialist, Heather Dube. The program was open to all current and new brick and mortar businesses in the City of Rahway.

- Applications were open from March 25-April 12. 14 businesses submitted applications of which seven were selected to move on to the second-round interview process.
- After meeting with the seven businesses and getting a better understanding of their goals and abilities to follow through with the program, three were selected. Wet Ticket Brewing, Sabor Peruano and Millie & Joy Boutique will each receive six months of social media management, mentoring and brand development.

IX. Ongoing Initiatives and Programs

○ **Holiday Lights**

- We are currently seeking proposals and estimates for new lighting designs and holiday décor. We are looking to illuminate downtown and create curated areas that will attract residents and visitors to the city to explore all that Rahway has to offer.
- **UPDATE:** We have met with one vendor and have scheduled calls with another vendor.

○ **Training & Continuing Education Opportunities for Businesses**

- We are working with the Rahway Department of Health, as well as county and state agencies to set up opportunities for our businesses to receive continued training and educational opportunities.
- We are again partnering with the Rahway Department of Health to provide ServSafe Food Manager training for our restaurants. This training will take place on June 10th.
- In the fall, we are looking to bring in state and county agencies that can provide grant information as well as courses on small business management skills.

○ **Website Revamp**

- www.Rahwayishappening.com website will undergo an overhaul to help make it a more user-friendly experience for visitors to the site.
- The site was first created in 2016 and has undergone updates, but this will be the first large scale update to the site in eight years.
- Some of the improvements will include easier to navigate menus, a newly designed Events Calendar and Business Directory and a facelift that will give the site a more modern look. Behind the scenes improvements will also be made to allow for a better user experience.

X. Ribbon Cuttings

○ **Buckle My Shoe Learning Academy - 378 E Milton Avenue**

Buckle My Shoe Learning Academy is a family run, licensed daycare and preschool provider serving children ages 2 1/2 to 13 years old. Offering full and half-day preschool, before and after school programs, transportation, and engaging summer camps, they strive to serve the needs of Rahway's diverse community by fostering a nurturing and innovative environment. On April 10, 2024, Mayor Giacobbe cut the ribbon to welcome the dedicated people who provide this essential service.

○ **Rahway Primary Care & Aesthetics - 1531 Irving Street**

On April 13th, 2024, Mayor Raymond Giacobbe welcomed Dr. Arshad and his team of medical professionals to their newest location in the heart of downtown Rahway. A welcome addition to the community, Rahway Primary Care serves all ages.

- **Protein Station** - 35 B East Milton Avenue

On May 1st, Mayor Raymond Giacobbe welcomed business owner, Juanita Vasquez, as they cut the ribbon for her newest venture, The Protein Station. Conveniently located at 35 B East Milton Avenue, she invites residents and travelers alike to enjoy a healthy protein shake or breakfast to fuel a busy day. On hand to help celebrate the occasion was Anthony Armando, Project Manager of The Special Improvement District (SID), and Heidi Loder-Rosal, President of the Rahway Chamber of Commerce.