



The Solano Avenue Association

Annual Newsletter from the Board of Directors

February 2013

Letter from our President

John Cowee
Architectural Concepts

Happy New Year! We hope everyone had a happy and healthy holiday season. We on the Association's Board enter 2013 with a renewed desire to pursue our mission: **"The Solano Avenue Association is dedicated to promoting and improving the Solano Avenue business district and to building community spirit and identity through events, marketing, and aesthetic enhancement."** I can attest to the fact that my fellow Board members and I are 100% dedicated to improving your experience as members of our Association.

We thought we'd use this year's annual newsletter to share key highlights from 2012, opportunities for 2013, and a vision for the long term community. We've asked a few Board members, all of whom have been working hard all year round in support of our mission, to contribute to this newsletter. Please take a moment out of your busy day to see what they have to say.

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Message from our Executive Director

Allen Cain
Executive Director, Solano Avenue Association

Thank you for your continued participation in our Association. I am here to serve you, our member merchants, and I greatly appreciate your feedback on the programs and events we continue to prepare for your benefit. This past year was a big year, and 2013 is shaping up to be even bigger. I wanted to use this letter to share some ideas that we have for 2013, and I hope to engage with you one on one during my daily rounds to collect your input.

Website and Mobile App: Many of our merchants wish to attract new customers to their businesses but have little or no web or mobile presence. So we engaged a website development company, based in North Berkeley, to build a tool to enable our members to interact directly with customers. We're pleased to announce that the Association will soon launch OnSolano.com, a new website and mobile app for merchants and their customers. The Association is subsidizing the creation of this community website along with mobile web apps customized for participating merchants. We negotiated two options for our members to choose between: a free subscription and a low-cost subscription. We're currently enrolling members on a first come, first served basis, so please contact us if you are interested in learning more.

Coupon program: I speak with merchants every day, and one thing everyone seems to agree on is the desire to drive more foot traffic to the street because of the shared the benefits to all of our merchants. The challenge is that no single merchant has the direct incentive to drive traffic to the street as a whole. That's

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I wanted to share a vision I have for the future of the Avenue. I believe we are all in this together in pursuit of building community. Our merchants have come together to deliver an outstanding experience to our neighborhood's customers. We believe that our individual business's value is enhanced by the richness of the community. A stronger community of merchants means a more inviting place for visitors. I envision a community where a customer walks into the neighborhood pharmacy, and the pharmacist addresses him by first name and asks how his recent health has been. A recent grad walks into a store to buy a new dress, and the store attendant congratulates her on her upcoming graduation and reminds her what size she wears. A couple walks into a restaurant, and the hostess shows them to their usual table and places their usual drink order.

Whether visitors live nearby or drive from miles away, everyone views Solano Avenue as an enjoyable destination, a neighborhood where you will always feel comfortable while spending time and money. Once a visitor comes to Solano Avenue, it's an experience that will have them returning again and again – international foods of almost every nationality, one-of-a-kind gift items, fashion clothing that dazzles or is practical. And it's no surprise that people on Solano Avenue still give you a smile or a tip of the hat as they pass.

On behalf of our Board, I'd like to thank Allen Cain, our Executive Director, for his tireless efforts over the past year. He is out on the Avenue every day, helping to make the neighborhood look its best. And thanks to his hard work in increasing Stroll participation and driving down expenses, we are happy to announce that member dues are not increasing for 2013, so please thank him next time you see him.

Lastly, our Association is only as strong as its participating members. I implore you to engage with our Association and our Board to help in our pursuit of our mission.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

John Cowee

Message from our Vice President

Jason Bellevue
RAF Investments

On behalf of my fellow Board members, we would like to acknowledge all those who helped us produce the 2012 Step into the Future Solano Avenue Stroll.

First, our Major Sponsors: John Nakamura at Albany Ford Subaru Saleen, Safeway, and the Cities of Albany and Berkeley. Our Media Partners included Comcast, the Daily Californian, KGO-TV Channel 7, Oakland Magazine, Parent's Press, and Patch.com (special thanks to Patrick Vance for producing the artwork).

Thank you to those who provided delicious food to the volunteers on the day of the event and electricity to the performers: Bua Luang, Cactus Taquería, Law Offices of Cheasty and Cheasty, The Church on the Corner, Fonda, Furniture Oasis, KNA Copy Centre, Noor and Sons, Schmidt's Tobacco Pub, Shoes on Solano, Solano Oriental Rug Gallery, Tannahill Realty, and Zand's Market.

Thank you to the generous restaurants who donated food to the kickoff party and the volunteers, including the SAA Board of Directors, who make it happen.

And lastly, a special thank you to the hosts of the 2012 kick-off party, Jason Alabanza and his staff at Mechanics Bank – Albany Office. We would also like to acknowledge Richard Hong at California Bank and Trust and his staff for opening the bank's doors on a Sunday to serve as Stroll headquarters.

Sincerely,

Jason Bellevue

Report from our Secretary

Jan Snidow
The Mane Alley

We are pleased to report our 2012 results. First, we wanted to share key statistics from our 2012 Stroll:

- 270,000 visitors (Berkeley Fire Department)
- 498 vendors (187 non-profit and community org's)
- 100 parade registrants
- 75 performers

Other events' attendance:

- Santa on Solano ~ 480 families
- Halloween on Solano ~ 1,000 trick-or-treaters
- Lunar New Year Celebration ~ 1,000 participants

Our membership now includes 165 paid members which represents 63% of Solano Avenue's front line businesses. We increased participation in the Solano Avenue Gift Card program to 60 merchants and our gift card purchase volume increased to \$24,450.

Sincerely,

Jan Snidow

Report from our Treasurer

Jason Alabanza
Mechanics Bank

We had a strong 2012 when it comes to financial performance. We outperformed our 2012 budget, with the key drivers for success being a sustainable and growing membership, another strong Solano Stroll, and finding creative ways to reduce expenses (kudos to Allen Cain). Lastly, we're happy to report that the strength of our balance sheet has enabled us to pursue and subsidize programs such as OnSolano.com for the benefit of our members.

In 2013 our financial goal is to identify additional sustainable sources of income to benefit our members, to fund programs that add value to our members and increase foot traffic to the Avenue, and most importantly, to give members the visibility and support needed to continue to grow the business district.

Sincerely,

Jason Alabanza

where we thought our Association could help. We identified a prospective direct mail partner who can help us develop and execute a new Solano Avenue Coupon Program. Before we pursue the opportunity, we'd like to collect your input on whether you would be interested in participating. During my daily stroll of the Avenue, I can share some of our current thoughts on the opportunity and get your thoughts as we shape the program.

We may be a street rich in history, but we are always looking for fresh new ideas. Two of our Association's members recently suggested the following ideas which are currently being explored:

Springtime event: We received a suggestion that the Association host a springtime event, perhaps in the form of a fashion show, to highlight our talented clothiers, stylists, and other personal service providers.

Disaster preparedness kits: We all know it's not a matter of *if*, but rather a matter of *when* the next big earthquake will strike. If you are in your store when the next earthquake hits the Bay Area, will you be prepared? We received a suggestion that the Association host a workshop during which merchants learn how to prepare their businesses.

Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge our Board of Directors who consistently volunteer their time to make the Association and the Avenue a better place for us all:

PRESIDENT - JOHN COWEE, ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPTS
VICE PRESIDENT JASON BELLEVUE, RAF INVESTMENTS
SECRETARY - JAN SNIDOW, THE MANE ALLEY
TREASURER - JASON ALABANZA, MECHANICS BANK – ALBANY
PAST PRESIDENT - SANG ROWAND, FARMERS INSURANCE
RICHARD HONG, CALIFORNIA BANK AND TRUST
HARRY PRUYN, SOLANO CLEANING CENTER
DAVID KREBS, WHOLE HEALTH APOTHECARY
DEBBIE PERKINS-KALAMA, KNA COPY CENTRE
MEMO ROBLES, CASA OAXACA
AUDI CONSTANCE, CFP FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS
TOM TAYLOR, ART THOU GRAPHICS
JASON HAIGHT, NORTH BERKELEY RESIDENT

Sincerely,

Allen Cain

ENGAGE!

WE INVITE YOU TO PARTICIPATE:

Would you like to join the SAA Board of Directors? We meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the. Help shape the future of Solano Avenue!

Would you like to volunteer in one of the Avenue's upcoming events? We're always looking for volunteers. If you're interested in participating, please email or call us.

Do you have a bright idea on how we could further pursue our Association's mission? We are all ears! We would enjoy hearing about any thoughts and experiences you may have and encourage you to share comments, concerns, or questions by emailing or calling.

Would you like to receive periodic updates from the Solano Avenue Association? We distribute a periodic SAA E-Newsletter to all email group participants. Please email us if you would like to be included in the distribution list.

Have you submitted your 2013 Membership Registration form? We've begun our planning for the 2013 Solano Avenue Stroll. We are asking merchants to submit their registration form by March 31 so that we can open Stroll registration to the public on April 16.

CONTACT INFO:

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Phone: 510-527-5358

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

FEBRUARY 10, 2013

This event features a parade and two hours of stage performances.

SAA ANNUAL MERCHANTS MEETING

MARCH 20, 2013, 5:30-8:30 PM

CALIFORNIA BANK AND TRUST

1451 SOLANO AVENUE

Installation of the Board of Directors, adjustments to the Association bylaws, and the presentation of our budget and annual report (CA Corporations Code 8321)

SOLANO STROLL KICK-OFF PARTY

AUGUST 8, 2013

Stroll announcements and presentation of the new Stroll poster and t-shirts

SOLANO STROLL

SEPTEMBER 8, 2013

This is our flagship event, held the second Sunday in September since 1974. This event is a distinctive opportunity for Association members to showcase their business to a crowd of over 250,000 Avenue guests.

HALLOWEEN ON SOLANO

OCTOBER 31, 2013

This wonderful event includes a costume contest and free snacks. It is one of the many ways that the Association gives back to the community at large. We encourage trick-or-treating on Solano which draws hundreds of local families to the Avenue.

SANTA ON SOLANO

FIRST FOUR WEEKENDS OF DECEMBER, 2013

We bring Santa's workshop to Solano, in conjunction with the Albany Chamber of Commerce. We coordinate entertainers, provide free photos with Santa, and encourage merchants to help decorate the Avenue.