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## **Huron County Launches Digital Service Squad to Help Small Businesses Adopt Online Technologies**

**Huron County, Ontario** – Huron County Economic Development, in partnership with nine municipalities and the eleven Business Improvement Areas (BIA) and other business groups across the County, has received a \$90,000 grant from Digital Main Street Ontario, funded by FedDev Ontario, for a Digital Service Squad to help main street businesses in the region use digital technologies to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The Squad will cover the Municipalities of Bluewater, Central Huron, Huron East, Morris-Turnberry and South Huron, as well as the Town of Goderich and the Townships of North Huron, Howick and Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh.

“Huron County’s small, main street businesses are the heart of our communities, and we are committed to ensuring that they continue to flourish,” says Warden Jim Ginn. “Through participation in the Digital Service Squad program, our businesses will be better positioned to compete in an increasingly digital world.”

Established in 2018, Digital Main Street Ontario was recently extended thanks to an investment of \$42.5 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and \$7.45 million from the Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The almost \$50-million investment will help small businesses across Ontario to pivot their operations to include online business models, regain lost revenue and become more resilient and competitive as the economy recovers. The Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) administers the DMS grant program to Ontario’s main street small businesses.

“Ontario’s small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and the keystone of our economic recovery. That is why we have invested in Digital Main Street to help these enterprises adapt to doing business in a digital world, and take advantage of the record number of people shopping online. Congratulations to Huron County on the launch of your Digital Service Squad. The work you’re doing with small businesses in your community will help keep our main streets vibrant, support good, local jobs and help our economy come back strong,” said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Digital Service Squads are fundamental to Digital Main Street's design and success, with trained specialists who meet with small businesses, at no cost, to help them improve their online presence. The squads assist with a number of activities, including developing a Google My Business profile, enhancing their social media presence and providing support for basic website and e-commerce set-up. Squads will also assist qualified small businesses through the application process for a \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grant, which includes an online assessment, online training modules and the development of a Digital Transformation Plan.

"The COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario's main streets hard, so Digital Main Street is needed more than ever," said Kay Matthews, Executive Director of OBIAA. "We know that businesses that participated in Digital Main Street last year were better able to cope when the pandemic hit, and we're excited that FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT are providing the funding to extend this important program to help small main street business like those across Huron County."

The Digital Service Squad program will host a virtual launch event on Thursday, October 8 at 2:00 pm that will explain more about how the program works and how businesses can get involved. Follow Huron County Economic Development on [Facebook](#) for more details or email [economicdevelopment@huroncounty.ca](mailto:economicdevelopment@huroncounty.ca) if you would like the assistance of a Squad member.

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#### **ABOUT OBIAA**

OBIAA is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association supports and advocates on behalf of its members through the building and nurturing of strong relationships and partnerships. OBIAA is a leader in the development and sharing of information, tools, resources and best practices, and is the ONE voice on common issues.

#### **ABOUT Digital Main Street**

Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads teams of street-level experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. The program was originally created in 2016 by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and a group of strategic partners including Google, MasterCard, Microsoft, and Shopify. For more information, please visit [digitalmainstreet.ca](http://digitalmainstreet.ca)

#### **ABOUT Digital Main Street Ontario**

Digital Main Street was expanded across all of Ontario in 2018 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through the \$38 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative. It has been further extended through a funding from FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT. The new round of funding includes \$42.5 million from the Government of Canada's [Regional Relief and Recovery Fund](#), a national recovery initiative delivered by Canada's regional development agencies. With \$7.45 million from MEDJCT, this combined federal and provincial project will strengthen Ontario's economic capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration, and will promote the development of a strong and diversified Ontario economy. For more information, please visit [digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants](http://digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants)