

These businessmen sweep own doorstep

By Don Atkinson
(Herald staff writer)

With members ranging from banks and medical practices to a tattoo parlor, a group of 72 South Calgary businesses is taking a new approach to improving their community and promoting it as a viable business and shopping area.

"It's a one-of-a-kind opportunity to really do something for an area," says Jon Lord, chairman of the Marda Loop Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ), formerly the South Calgary BRZ.

"I think this BRZ program has a lot of potential to really improve the community as a whole. Over the next few years, you might see some big changes down here."

Marda Loop is the second and smallest of three Calgary business revitalization zones now in various stages of formation. It basically covers 33rd and 34th Avenues S.W. between 24th and 17th Streets.

The first zone approved by city council was developed by a 470-member 17th Avenue S.W. group, calling itself Uptown 17. A third, the 180-member Kensington-Louise Crossing zone, will seek city approval next month.

The program started in June 1983 when the provincial government passed legislation permitting municipal governments to establish BRZs and impose levies to finance the groups' activities.

Lord, owner of Casablanca Video, says his group may not be the biggest but it's the first to get rolling and stage a promotional event.

Summerfest, to be held Saturday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. in a vacant lot at the corner of 21st Street and 33rd Avenue S.W., marks the first opening of a Calgary BRZ.

The festival, featuring a farmers' market, charity dunk tank, car raffle, corn roast, live bands, flea market and other attractions, is designed to increase awareness of the area as a viable business and shopping centre.

Lord says the Marda Loop BRZ — named after the Marda Theatre, now a neighborhood Odeon, and an old streetcar loop — has the potential to develop and improve a community that was in danger of deteriorating.

In many ways a BRZ can do for an area what a large shopping mall does for its tenants in promoting events and attracting customers.

As chairman, Lord heads a board of directors of nine business



Larry MacDougal, Calgary Herald

Jon Lord, left, and Pat Mattern are proud of their neighborhood

people, a South Calgary Community Association representative and two aldermen, Craig Reid and Barb Scott.

Each BRZ is supported by a compulsory additional city levy on business taxes. Lord says the Marda Loop levy has been started at 2.27 per cent. The city takes the levy and returns it to the board of directors, which is responsible for developing programs and submitting an annual budget to city council for approval.

The Marda Loop group has also obtained a government grant to hire university student Pat Mattern as a marketing manager to help the board promote the area. Mattern has been working this summer

out of basement offices donated by a local law firm.

Lord and Mattern say they "still have to prove this thing can fly."

Marda Loop wants to use signs, flowerpots, trees and other devices to improve the area's image. It hopes to attract new shoppers and businesses.

Lord also sees the BRZ as an effective lobby group representing area businesses at city hall. For example, there are now seven grocery stores in the zone and the group could try to discourage any more overbuilding.

Marda Loop BIA early years

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