



## Businesses flocking downtown

Meredith MacLeod

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Ivan Mavrinc has joined a race downtown.

The owner of I.M. Leathers shifted his business from the corner of Ray and Hunter, where it was located for 35 years, to King Street East near Ferguson.

His is among almost three dozen businesses that decided to call downtown home in 2011.

Mavrinc, who specializes in creating customized leather suits for motorcycle racers, says he's enjoyed his move to the core.

"The people here are friendly, there's a nice attitude and there is lots of traffic past the storefront."

He got tired of maintaining his property on Ray and sold it. He wants to rent so that he can concentrate on his work, which also includes fashion items, such as coats, shirts and chaps — and a growing market in downhill skateboarders.

His racing suits, which are reinforced with knee pads and elbow pads, can withstand crashes at 200 miles an hour.

Mavrinc, who has sold his work to major retailers and created custom stagewear for musicians, says he's looking forward to turning the front of his shop into a gallery space for his work and for local jewellers and artists.

His store, nestled between the venerable Black Forest Inn and a nail salon, was once a nail salon.

"There is a growing artsy feel along here," he said.

"My job is to take someone's vision and bring it to life. ... Every job is an adventure."

Together, the Downtown Hamilton BIA and the International Village BIA added 35 new merchants and other companies to their memberships. The list includes retailers, financial services, arts and media groups, restaurants and health clinics.

In addition, a specialty book store and a tattoo parlour, will soon open in the International Village.

Glen Norton, the city's manager of urban renewal, says there are probably another 10 or so new businesses on James Street that aren't included in the BIA numbers.

He says the walkability of Hamilton's downtown, combined with the focus on cleanliness and safety by the BIAs and police, are encouraging people to visit and stroll the streets.

Norton also says growing numbers of people living and working downtown will draw more businesses downtown. "The two feed off each other."

"I think it's all a positive sign that things are really turning around downtown," said Susan Baithwaite, executive director of the International Village BIA.

"We've seen about 17 new businesses open and that's a big number for us. We're filling a number of vacancies that have been empty a long time."

Baithwaite says she believes the core is on the edge of a "tipping point" in terms of momentum.

"There are so many different people involved in revitalizing the downtown that I think it can't help, but keep happening."

Unique new restaurants and shops and downtown events are bringing visitors, she said.

"I think the culture of small business is coming back. I feel the momentum. People are looking beyond big-box stores."

Judi McIntyre said it wasn't a difficult decision to locate her Parisian-flavoured boutique, Accoutrements, to King Street downtown.

"I like the hum of Hamilton," said the Burlington resident, making her first foray into retailing.

"I love the big city vibe here in the International Village. It has a Toronto vibe. It's a unique neighbourhood that you don't get in Oakville or Burlington."

## **The newcomers**

### **Downtown Hamilton BIA**

Downtown Bikehounds

MG International

Accessible Media Inc.

First Ontario Credit Union

Babylon Monetary Services

Goldmasters Cash for Gold

Gift & Glam Boutique

Southern Ontario College

Steel House Grill

The Bay Observer

Hamilton Colonoscopy Clinic

Smordin Law

Mike Keith Traffic Ticket Specialists

YMCA Immigrant Settlement Services

Nexus Staffing

Homegrown Café

Baltimore House

### **International Village BIA**

Accoutrements

Barbarossa's Cafe

Cho Sun OK Korean

Fringe Hair Studio

Angels and Demons

Soul Classics

Hamilton Clinic

Joy's Karaoke

Mafu's Kitchen

E-Zone Karaoke

KASA Sushi/BBQ Fish

Ziegler's South Pacific

Mirage Night Club

Imperial Coin

Zoran Jewelers

Michui Restaurant

Monika's Closet

I.M. Leathers

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