

November 28, 2011

Mount Kisco's retail resiliency

By Kelly Liyakasa

Filling the hole left by Borders in Mount Kisco may turn on selling the village as a destination for northern Westchester and Fairfield counties.

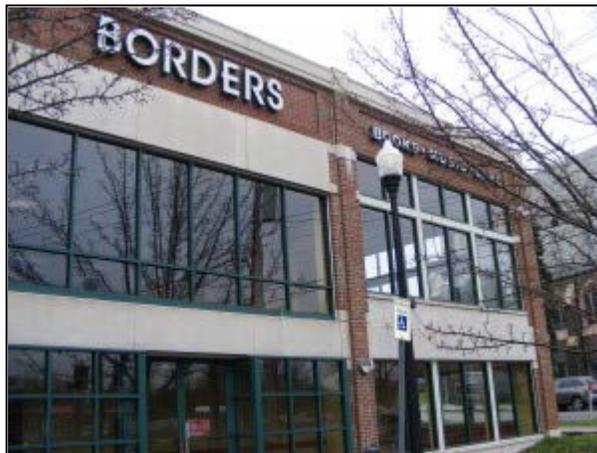
"If it was a stand-alone store, it would have stayed in business," Mayor Michael Cindrich said of the 21,500-square-foot bookstore. "We were affected by what's going on in the rest of the world. That Borders was a gathering place, a destination place that helped bring other people into town."

Brokers want to help prospective tenants to think "destination" again.

"When we market Mount Kisco to the national retailers, they don't know the nuances of the micro-market," said commercial real estate agent Jonathan Gordon, president and CEO of Admiral Real Estate Services in Bronxville. "I feel that it's my job to get them to expand their radius rings from where they'll draw customers from."

Gordon represented the owners of Mount Kisco Square Shopping Center this summer on a lease transaction that secured an 11,000-square-foot tenant in pet goods superstore Petco.

"For example, Petco might need to have 'this' many households with dogs within a three-mile ring of that store," Gordon said. "I feel it's my job to get them to expand to seven to eight miles, so you get Pound Ridge, Chappaqua, Armonk – when they do regional shopping, that's where they go."



The Borders that was on Main Street in Mount Kisco.

One business that considered its regional placement when planning expansion was Grand Prix New York, a corporate meetings and go-cart racing facility that just opened a boutique Spins Bowl center on premises.

"It's something like 15 to 17 years since Mount Kisco Bowl closed and when we studied demographics for the community, a lot of people were interested in social activities," Cindrich said. "Jim Diamond and (Diamond Properties) continue to invest in the community, and it's a compliment to Grand Prix racing."

Cindrich noted the growth of Mount Kisco Medical Group, "a landmark business" that employs some 800 workers within the confines of its Hudson Valley footprint.

Northern Westchester Hospital is “forever increasing their staff,” now at about 1,400 workers.

“Right now they’re before the planning board to put up a new parking structure,” Cindrich said. “They’re close to approval and I expect we’ll see a lot of activity over the winter and spring to complement the new emergency room....They’re not paying real estate taxes, but they’re employing people.”

The robustness of retail and residential markets relies on regional employment.

“The village is taking a much more proactive approach in trying to enhance the business environment,” noted Philip Bronzi, the newest president of the Mount Kisco Chamber of Commerce, who also serves as vice president, business banking and commercial lending at Community Mutual Savings Bank in Eastchester.



Philip Bronzi, president, Mount Kisco Chamber of Commerce, stands affront Frannie's Goodie Shop, a frozen yogurt café establishment he says is booming.

“We even have some of the trustees who have joined the chamber as civic members, who come to our meetings so they can get a pulse of what’s going on with our business owners.”

About 50 new members joined the chamber this year, Bronzi said, including those who were new in town and established professionals looking to the organization as a viable way to get their names out there.

“We’ve become more focused on the value-added proposition that we can provide the membership,” Bronzi said. “We want to help our members promote themselves. We started a newsletter this year, which we will be doing quarterly and we allow our members to do member spotlights.”

The chamber will incorporate village restaurants in after-hours events and has already hosted social media panels and cyber-security forums in conjunction with local business owners.

“Mount Kisco is evolving, because it has to,” Bronzi said.

But despite retail closures and resulting vacancies, it’s a uniquely entrepreneurial community.

“Speaking with some of the retailers, they’re concerned, but they still believe it’s a location doing a little better than anyone else,” Cindrich said.