

2009 “outlook” for 40 Below Cortland *** *Breaking New Ground*

Anytime there are more than three people in a room – things seem to happen. Ideas unravel into proposed projects and action items are listed on a piece of paper with little check boxes beside them.

40 Below Cortland enjoyed a year of checking off to-do items in order to provide the 40 Below community with events, programs and opportunities that addressed the issues and interests that were voiced early in the year. The launch of the new website – www.40belowcortland.org - provided a platform from which members and friends could participate in a survey, share ideas and catch-up on news or upcoming events.

The survey revealed that most members are less interested in social, after-hours mixers and instead, are more interested in participating in community service projects and family-friendly events. Other areas of interest included professional development and networking programs. The opinions were heard and the newly elected advisory board sought to develop opportunities that would both directly address the interests of the members and create new opportunities for people to become involved with their community in meaningful ways.

Students can be considered the youngest demographic within the 40 Below profile. They also represent the potential future leaders, decision makers and business owners of Cortland County. For these reasons and more, it made perfect sense for 40 Below Cortland to say “Yes!” when asked by Homer High School’s economics teacher Joe Cortese if our membership might take on mentoring roles with his students. During the course of a month or more, 40 Below members met with student groups to provide feedback on their original business plans. Then Executive Director of the Cortland Downtown Partnership and 40 Below founding member Lloyd Purdy, challenged the students to come up with business models that might be suited well for Downtown Cortland specifically. Members that served as mentors found the experience to be very rewarding.

“It’s both exciting and encouraging to see unique and creative ideas coming from students in our own community” said Scott Hopko, 40 Below board member and owner of Hopko Designs. “After listening and critiquing the students’ ideas, we knew that we needed to share their work with the greater community”. That was the start of *40 Below Presents*, a program co-sponsored by SUNY Cortland’s economics department. The groups that ranked highest amongst their peers and community mentors were invited to present again in April at the Beard Building as part of a public presentation. A second annual event is slated for early this spring.

As the weather warmed and members, families and friends found themselves enjoying the summer months in Cortland, 40 Below made their first appearance at the Main Street Music series. No, we weren't the featured act on the main stage, but members did volunteer their time during the warm summer Friday evenings, serving the crowds of people who looked forward to the live music each week. We look forward to collaborating again in '09!

Late summer brought members to Virgil to enjoy fun in the sun at Hope Lake. This was the group's first event sponsored by local businesses including the Dryden Hotel, Hopko Designs, LMK Companies, Reality Check and Price Chopper. Their support is most appreciated and allowed new and existing members to enjoy the lake, and all aspects of the park for free. Everyone who attended enjoyed the food and music provided and some experienced the serene tranquility of the surroundings for the very first time.

The fall and early winter offered opportunities to attend events focused on politics and new business – not necessarily at the same time. 40 Below members were welcomed to the Red Jug Pub to meet the local candidates campaigning for leadership roles in the 2008 election. Dave Hartnett, Mark Suben and Tim Armstrong shared their respective vision for Cortland and engaged with the group in an informal question and answer conversation.

On the eve of Thanksgiving, 40 Below Cortland featured four new and emerging businesses in the 1st annual Entrepreneur Spotlight. Existing and new members of 40 Below Cortland gathered at the old Cortland Corset building which has recently transformed into one of the greenest spaces in town. New companies gave tours and tastes as an inside look to their work: Hopko Designs, Cortland Beer Company, Roger William Photography and GoVo BioFuels, LLC. Event attendees learned more about the new businesses, the future plans for the building and even posed for a photo opp (photo provided courtesy of Roger William Thiese www.rogerwilliamphotography.com)!

The year ahead looks promising for 40 Below Cortland. We continue to welcome new members and ideas. Make your ideas known, become involved and help us create an even bigger list with many, many meaningful check-marks.

Lauren Mossotti-Kline
Advisory Board Member
40 Below Cortland