

The biz plate special

Norfolk Community Business Cafés showcase neighborhoods and inspire entrepreneurs

WHEN YOU HEAR CAFÉ, you probably think food, right? In Norfolk, the city has opened the doors on two cafes' where you won't find food but dishes of helpful business advice.

Community Business Cafés offer a menu of business, real estate and technical resources to entrepreneurs and developers. The Cafés take place bi-weekly in a relaxed atmosphere. Attendees can dive into specific topics, network and build relationships.

"The Cafés are at the heart of our comprehensive urban revitalization model," said Peter Chapman, Deputy City Manager of Economic and Community Development. "We have tremendous local, state and federal partners working with us to provide free resources and support. Each Café suits the specific character of the neighborhood, advancing the authentic and vibrant spirit we have in Norfolk."

In charting this endeavor, it was apparent that Norfolk needed to showcase each neighborhood in its authentic vibe. Norfolk conducted several "Better Block" demonstration projects, which gave community stakeholders an opportunity to transform vacant storefronts into pop-up shops and eateries to imagine the possibilities.

In the case of Park Place, soul food restaurants, new residents, a brewery and artisanal manufacturing are charting an "uptown funk" vibe attractive to existing small businesses and residents interested in entrepreneurship.

Norfolk launched its first Community Business Café in the Park Place neighborhood in 2015. The Café offers free services to Park Place residents interested in starting a new business, expanding an existing firm or relocating a business. Services

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– Peter Chapman, Deputy City Manager of Economic and Community Development

include financial, marketing, management and technical assistance. It also provides entrepreneurs with the organizational framework, resource network, and motivation to build sustainable businesses in the community.

The city next targeted the Ocean View commercial corridor and in February opened the Ocean View Business Café.

Ocean View offers seven miles of coastline centered between Naval Station Norfolk and Little Creek Amphibian Base. This eclectic coastal village has undergone dramatic change.

East Beach, a 300-acre development, carries the label as one of the best designed coastal villages in the country. Upscale, but limited mom & pops have opened up.

In a city where thousands of active duty military men and women are making the transition to "veteran" each month, the Ocean View Business Café will offer a wealth of services to veterans. Veterans and returning service members bring unique skills and experiences to the civilian workforce and the City is committed to retain these talented veterans.

The city, which has been certified by Virginia Values Veterans (V3) since 2012, will continue to enhance existing veterans' programs by helping employers implement nationally recognized best practices in recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans and will assist veterans interested in opening a new business. (See V3 story on next page.)

The Ocean View Café will offer V3 trainings and identify existing veteran-owned businesses. By partnering with the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development, the Cafés hope to maximize the availability, application and usability of all SBA programs for veterans.

Norfolk plans to open more Cafés in other key commercial corridors throughout the city in the future. The Community Business Café offers the right ingredients to achieve urban revitalization, job growth and opportunity for all residents. 

About the authors

Lori Crouch is the Corporate Communications Director for the City of Norfolk. Sarah Parker is the Assistant Director of Marketing for the City of Norfolk.

(right) Norfolk City Manager Marcus Jones meeting Park Place youth volunteering at the Community Business Café.



The kick-off event for the Park Place Business Café.