

"Prepare for a whirlwind" former Small Business Revolution communities discuss the experience

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ALTON - With yesterday's announcement of Alton being selected as the showcased city in season three of the Deluxe Corporation's *Small Business Revolution*, many people in the city are wondering what to expect next.

Currently, several businesses and non-profits within 1.5 miles of Downtown Alton are completing paper applications to send to the show's producers. Of those applicants, six will be chosen to split as much as \$500,000 worth of investment with each other and the city from Deluxe Corporation. Those businesses will also be featured on the show, which airs on Deluxe Corporation's website as well as online streaming service Hulu. Since Alton has been the third city chosen, Riverbender.com contacted leadership in the two previous municipalities who received the honor - Wabash, Indiana, and Bristol Borough, Pennsylvania.

Each said the words "prepare for a whirlwind" when the production crew of *Small Business Revolution* blows into town this summer. Each also said the national attention greatly assisted their communities, which are each less than half the size of Alton.

Bill Pezza, who heads "Raise the Bar" in Bristol Borough, said via email he voted for Alton to win season three. He congratulated the town, and said the attention changed his town "dramatically." In fact, after the win and being featured on the show, Pezza penned a book called *How Bristol Won, and We'll Keep on Winning*.

"We had a pretty good civic group going for us beforehand," he said. "It was a dramatic thing for us. It really boosted people's confidence."



Besides assisting six businesses in town, Deluxe Corporation also provided the city with a new sound system for its riverfront as well as poles and kiosks for banners promoting upcoming events. That sound system was a huge deal for Bristol Borough, Pezza said.

Wabash Mayor Scott Long said the process for his town during season one was much different. Instead of an application process, the six businesses were chosen by the crew after a series of visits.

Long said Wabash was chosen because of a concentrated effort between the city, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the town's Main Street Chapter.

“It's quite a ride, honestly,” he said. “They paid for a pocket park in the downtown area, and helped decorate a pedestrian walkway between two city blocks. They spruced it up a bit and added shading panels we use in the summer time.”

While the city itself was helped by Deluxe Corporation, Long said the majority of time and attention went into the town's businesses.

Pezza said a lot of the dedication from Deluxe Corporation to the businesses in Bristol Borough included a lot of technical support, including website building and marketing, but said at least one business received physical support through the updating of a facade.



In Wabash, Long said the assistance from the show brought business owners in the town much closer together. He said they worked in tandem instead of competing.

“I think it built a stronger spirit of cooperation inside the city,” he said.

Each city also received more national attention, investment and tourism. Pezza said Bristol Borough had as many as 26 empty buildings not being utilized properly before *Small Business Revolution* began filming. As of now, the town is down to 10 buildings and six of those are under contract and having work done.

In Wabash, the entire county, which has around 34,000 people and is located in the heart of Indiana, Long said tourism dollars increased by as much as \$4 million. He said a small business making dulcimers in California also considered moving their facility to Wabash after seeing the town featured on the show. Unfortunately, Long said one of the owners of that company was diagnosed with stage four cancer, and the move was canceled.

But, in order to completely reap the benefits *Small Business Revolution* brings to town, both Long and Pezza agreed the entire city is responsible for continuing the momentum built through the selection process and filming. Pezza said the entire city, including businesses and city organizations will have to make themselves accommodating to the crew of the show. Each said the crew from Deluxe was friendly and great to host.



“Enjoy this for a year, but know you need a plan in place to sustain it when Deluxe leaves,” Pezza said. “Ride this wave while you can, but know a year from now there will

be a different Miss America, and you will need a way to maintain that attention you'll be getting. It was a carnival while they were here.”

When asked if the cost of living increased in the towns with so much outside attention and investment, Long said he did not have enough data to answer that. Pezza said Bristol Borough still enjoys a similar cost of living as it did before the show, but admitted some owners of vacant buildings and lots may have an idea they can charge more for that property after being featured on the show.

Seasons one and two of the show, which features Wabash and Bristol Borough respectively, can be found on www.deluxe.com/small-business-revolution or streaming on Hulu.

