

# SBS IN THE NEWS



## Staten Island Advance

### Staten Island merchants evince grit in walking tour Merchants tell strolling Chamber members how they're coping with the sluggish economy

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Since the economy has slowed down, Dongan Hills business manager Alison Marchese says she's making do with a smaller crew at Es-Ca Restaurant.

"We're surviving. This has been the hardest year since we opened seven years ago," explained Ms. Marchese. "Everyone is feeling it but we're trying to get through it. We have a lot of repeat customers and that has saved us."

During a walking tour conducted yesterday by the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, owners of small businesses along Richmond Road explained that the recession has forced them into numerous changes in their operations in order to survive.

For Es-Ca, that means adding specials to the menu and reducing the number of employees. For Fire Glow Inc., it was telling their employees they have to take unpaid furloughs.

"This is not my first recession," Marilyn Losacco, president of 43-year-old Fire Glow Inc., told Linda Baran, president of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce.

"Like everybody else, our sales are down. So you have to pull in the apron strings a little bit and you have to be a little more creative. We're trying," she explained.

A team of 17 people from the Chamber's office, its membership committee and Business Guilds, Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office and the city's Small Business Services broke up in three groups and visited with nearly 60 businesses along Richmond Road. It was the third walking tour the chamber has conducted this year. The groups listened to businesses' concerns, offered advice and informed them about Chamber programs and benefits.

"We're very interested in what they have to say and how they're doing," said Ms. Baran. "It was actually encouraging that they said things were difficult but they are holding their own. And, the woman in this business [Es-Ca Restaurant] says she sees the light at the end of the tunnel."

Joining Ms. Baran on the walking tour were: Ken Schneider of P.A.C. Plumbing, chairman of the Chamber's membership committee; Ted Williams, Safari Realty; Dovid Winiarz, Trump Financial; Tom O'Neil, Potter & LaMarca; Debbie Romeo of Gillani Homes; Regina Boukhvalova of SI Bank & Trust; Danielle Patanella of Innovative Planning Services; Antoinette Dorfman of New Skin Enterprise; Eric Parker and Dina Mintz, both of NYC Small Business Services; Joan Wilton of Bridge Financial; Roseann Castellano, membership coordinator for the Chamber; Hector Cortes of Berstein Global Wealth Management; Victoria Larsen, Staten Island Director of Community Affairs Unit of the mayor's office; Rosemarie Scampas of Informed Business, chairwoman of the Chamber board, and Geri Nappi of MetLife.

The business owners along Richmond Road were uniform in expressing gratitude to their loyal customers.

Chad Cannizzaro, third-generation owner of Carroll's Garden Florist, also noted that Carroll's, which opened in 1949, emphasizes good customer service.

"We're on top of everything. We're making sure that everything that goes out of here is beautiful and meets the customer's needs. We try to be as personable, build a relationship with the customers ... just do the best we can. Thankfully, we have a lot of loyal customers.

In tough times, Ms. Losacco said, businesses should work with each other. "Don't stress out over this because you know everybody is going to make it through this. Give a helping hand, if you can. Everybody deserves a hand up," she said.