

Toronto-born Business Improvement Area (BIA) program celebrates 50-year milestone

Toronto, ON – Toronto’s Business Improvement Area (BIA) program is celebrating 50 years. The Toronto-born concept’s enabling legislation was signed by the province on September 16, 1970. The idea of a business association has since proliferated globally from North America to Europe to Asia.

“The 50th anniversary is a proud milestone for Toronto’s BIA program,” says Toronto Mayor John Tory. “The BIA program has proven to be a prime example of Torontonians’ entrepreneurial spirit and has helped forge strong and mutually beneficial public and private partnerships since its inception. I want to thank all past and present staff and volunteers at Toronto’s many BIAs for their continued work and dedication to our great city.”

A group of business owners in the as-of-yet unchristened Bloor West Village community laid the groundwork for the first BIA in 1967. Foreseeing the impact of airconditioned shopping malls and a subway that would move foot traffic underground, the group banded together to take matters into their own hands.

It took three years to get the legislation necessary to create a levy for local businesses that could be used to improve the area. Over the next few years, the concept spread and today that program is global.

In Toronto alone, there are 84 BIAs representing a diverse range of 70,000 businesses and property owners. The priorities of those BIAs continue to be defined by local business stakeholders with all funds being reinvested back into the communities. According to the 2018 BIA Metrics report, \$38 million was invested in Toronto neighbourhoods.

“The BIA program has had a profound impact on Toronto,” says John Kiru, Executive Director of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA). “It’s helped businesses thrive. It’s helped shape the neighbourhoods we call home. And the changes it’s enabled in our communities has helped put Toronto on the map as a world-class destination.”

COVID-19 has had an indelible impact on Toronto’s business community but Kiru says he is confident in that community’s ability to persevere as it moves towards the next iteration of the program.

“We’re proud of the past 50 years and we’re using this opportunity to look to the future – we’re calling it BIA 5.0,” says Kiru. “We’re ready for the next generation of the BIA program.”

TABIA is calling on businesses, BIAs and Torontonians to celebrate this milestone by sharing how the BIA program has shaped them using #50YearsofBIAs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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ABOUT TABIA:

The Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) is a non-profit umbrella organization working with the 84 Business Improvement Areas within the City of Toronto, who in turn represent more than 70,000 business and property owners.

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