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Large lift for small business

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The dollar store owner paused from ringing up her customers as Maria Torres-Springer, Commissioner of the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), together with Lisa Sorin, Executive Director of the Westchester Square Business Improvement District (BID), walked through her doors.

The two were stopping by for more than a shopping excursion. Instead, they had joined forces to kick off a door-to-door campaign to help local business owners better understand city regulations and avoid violations.

“We want to make sure we are providing with the information you need to comply with the rules,” explained Springer-Torres to Ekue, who opened Value Dollar City last September on Westchester Square.

The event was part of Small Business First, an initiative led by the Mayor’s Office of Operations, SBS and more than 15 partnering City agencies, which aims reach out to reach out to as many small businesses as possible in New York City during the summer months.

NYC Small Business First

“We are committed to better reaching business owners by delivering tailored information and assistance right to their door, and utilizing data to focus our educational outreach on the businesses and neighborhoods that need it most,” said Torres-Springer.

The decision to launch the outreach effort in the Bronx was made after analyzing data from the Mayor’s Office of Data Analytics (MODA) which indicated a high rate of violations in commercial corridors in the area.

“Small businesses in Westchester Square have been faced with fines and violations that could have been avoided had local business owners had a better understanding of city regulations,” remarked Lisa Sorin.

In addition, data showed that small businesses in the Bronx are growing at a higher rate than in other boroughs.

“There is great business growth here, and the highest percentage of retail businesses,” said Torres-Springer, noting that business in the borough has experienced a 14 percent growth from 2007 through 2012.



WESTCHESTER SQUARE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

On Wed., May 27th, the Commissioner and her team provided information to 100 retail businesses in Westchester Square, including a pharmacy, a beauty supply, and a clothing store.

“The on-the-ground customized support provided by SBS client managers will help New York City business owners avoid fines and violations, so they can spend more time running and growing their business, and less time navigating government,” said Torres-Springer.

In addition to the outreach campaign, Small Business First offers free services to help small businesses succeed at every stage – whether they are starting, operating or growing. Services include business courses, access to capital, legal assistance, employee training and more.

Westchester Square business owners said they were appreciative for the direct efforts. Ekue, a Nigerian immigrant, said that in seeking greater financial independence, she quit her position as a store manager at Macy’s and decided to open her own business.

Though business had been “tough,” she said she was determined to persevere – and the Commissioner’s visit strengthened her resolve.

“It shows that we matter,” said Ekue. “We count.”

