

BEN FRANKLIN COFFEEHOUSE CHALLENGE

The Coffeehouse Challenge offers neighborhood residents a unique opportunity to come together and make a difference in their communities. At a Coffeehouse Challenge meeting, community members will gather to discuss shared public concerns, with the aim of generating creative and practical solutions. This project aims to recreate Ben Franklin's special brew of civic generosity, by harnessing the power of collective action to bring lasting benefits to local communities. Coffeehouse Challenge discussions will take place between January and June 2006, in the Greater Philadelphia and Central Pennsylvania area. In September 2006, Starbucks will award \$3000 each to the five most ingenious and practical plans proposed by Coffeehouse Challenge groups.

Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary and Starbucks Coffee Company

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary and Starbucks Coffee Company are partnering to present the Coffeehouse Challenge in the Greater Philadelphia and Central Pennsylvania area.

The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary is a non-profit organization coordinating the national celebrations in honor of Ben Franklin's 300th birthday (January 17, 2006) through a series of national programs and events, and an international traveling exhibition, *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*. The Tercentenary's goal throughout all of its projects and programs is to highlight Franklin's contemporary relevance, so that all Americans may be inspired by his example.

Starbucks Coffee aims to make a positive difference in the communities where it operates, and values its role as a community meeting place. In fact, the coffeehouse has long been a place of debate and discussion; many of Franklin's most valuable and ingenious ideas came out of sociable meetings in his local coffeehouse.

What is a Coffeehouse Challenge?

It is an informal and lively discussion where community members will share their thoughts on particular local concerns, and more importantly, generate potential solutions.

Each Challenge is organized by a volunteer, with the support of the local Starbucks and the Tercentenary. (If a Starbucks location is not available to host a local Coffeehouse Challenge discussion, any agreed upon site will do.)

At the end of each inaugural discussion Coffeehouse Challenge groups can commit to regular meetings in order to turn their best ideas into reality. **In September, Starbucks will award \$3000 each to five ingenious proposals that need funding.**

In the past two years, over 200 successful Coffeehouse Challenges have occurred in the United Kingdom. One of the best outcomes was that people discovered common interests and purposes, made connections, and decided that it was not only possible to do something about an important local issue but preferable to waiting for others to take action.

What should we talk about?

The best subjects seem to be ones about which the community feels strongly and can be improved upon with collective action. To identify particular local concerns, consider the issues highlighted in your local newspaper, or talk to your neighbors and colleagues. Be like Ben Franklin – look closely at your surroundings in order to understand and improve them. Many of the areas which concerned Ben are still relevant today: he and his friends worked for clean and safe streets, environmental action and regulation, civil defense, and better health-care and educational opportunities for all. You could choose to follow his lead and discuss ways to **1**

reduce waste; to promote healthy lifestyles; to make neighborhoods safer; or to bring entrepreneurial or educational opportunities to your area. Franklin's interest in domestic industry might even qualify him as an early member of the "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" movement! From libraries to swimming and agriculture to prisons, Franklin took an interest in all aspects of society, and came up with ways to partner with others and make a positive impact. We believe that generous civic spirit is still alive today.

For more inspiration, here are just a handful of Coffeehouse Challenge topics from the United Kingdom:

Food fit for Kids, Fleet Street, London

This project planned an affordable healthy snack delivery service to local schools, complete with attractive packaging that explained important nutritional information.

Creating Support for the Transition Out of Benefits and Student Debt, Brighton

This project identified a number of common obstacles to self-sufficiency for long-term benefit recipients, and recommended initiatives to counter them – some of which were put into action directly at the community level.

Pay-as-you-waste, Cambridge

This pilot project tried out various schemes combining rebates per pound of domestic recycling with charges per pound of domestic refuse, to find the most feasible economic scheme to minimize waste.

Skills at Work, Cambridge

This group came up with programs to connect unemployed adults with organizations that can help them develop basic skills and problem-solving abilities.

Support for the Coffeehouse Challenge

For additional information or support, please feel free to contact Nicola Twilley at the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary by phone at 215.557.0733 or by email at ntwilley@benfranklin300.org. Starbucks district and store managers will also be working to ensure the success of each Coffeehouse Challenge.

Where do I go for help?

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