

MAINSTREETNOW

The Journal of The National Trust Main Street Center

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010

LOCAL SUPPORT



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BY DONNA ANN HARRIS



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By Doug Loescher,
Director, NTMSC



PARTNERING FOR “SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES”

In the long march toward national recognition for our movement, I am happy to report that the “Main Street brand” is more visible than ever with key players in the national arena including, believe it or not, the federal government.

This month, the International City/County Management Association published a new book, *Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities*. Beyond its long title, this guide offers some quick recommendations that form a holistic three-part strategy. One of their top strategies? Historic preservation and the Main Street Approach® in places like El Dorado, Arkansas. (Go to http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/documents/kn/Document/301483/Putting_Smart_Growth_to_Work_in_Rural_Communities to download a free online copy).

About the same time, the mayor of Lee’s Summit, Missouri, received a letter of congratulations from the National League of Cities, which represents more than 1,600 cities and towns for its recent Great American Main Street Award® designation.

And recently, representatives of three federal agencies – the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) – convened in Washington, D.C., to consider the first year of progress for their new “Sustainable Communities” collaboration, an unprecedented agreement to coordinate federal housing, transportation, and environmental programs. And what, exactly, have they learned? “Fix It First” should drive all funding decisions, and downtowns are at the center of that philosophy.

These three agencies are not alone. In a recent meeting with officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), they commented to me that while USDA and other agencies are well suited for project development (through grant funding), they do not have the strength “on the ground” to produce long-term results and manage community development. That’s why they are turning to Main Street programs in many states to find creative community development strategies – from building food hubs in Wyoming to planning sustainable streetscapes in Iowa.

These are small victories for our movement, from a time when we were at best invisible or at worst irrelevant to people outside the Main Street and preservation worlds. But collectively, these small steps toward visibility are giving Main Street a significant, permanent “place at the table” within the larger community development field, where sustainability and livability can all be accomplished in one place.

Six Principles for Sustainable Communities

The federal agency collaboration involving HUD, EPA, DOT, and USDA is providing funding, leadership, and support for “alignment” along six principles:

- 1. Provide more transportation choices.** Develop safe, reliable, and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public health.
- 2. Promote equitable, affordable housing.** Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.
- 3. Enhance economic competitiveness.** Improve economic competitiveness through reliable, timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services, and other basic needs of workers, as well as expanded business access to markets.
- 4. Support existing communities.** Target federal funding toward existing communities – through strategies such as transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling – to increase community revitalization, improve the efficiency of public works investments, and safeguard rural landscapes.
- 5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.** Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.
- 6. Value communities and neighborhoods.** Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods – rural, urban, and suburban.



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The National Trust for Historic Preservation is the only national, private organization chartered by Congress to encourage public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history. The National Trust Main Street Center provides technical assistance in downtown and neighborhood commercial district revitalization to communities throughout the nation.

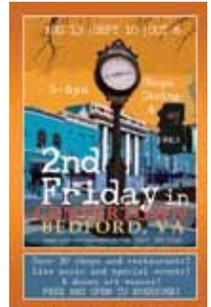
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Make Your Case: Triple your **Membership!**

BY DONNA ANN HARRIS

In October 2007, board members of MainStreet Libertyville, Illinois, a 1997 Great American Main Street Award® winner, realized the organization was on the brink of financial collapse. The month before, their annual fundraiser, Street Dance, was held on a rainy and cold night. “Attendance was down drastically and so was the revenue,” recalls board member Les Galo. The event’s net profits, which had been upwards of \$60,000 in past years, fell precipitously to \$2,000 that year.

Adding to this looming deficit was the swift decline in support from the Village of Libertyville during the previous three years. Since the founding of MainStreet Libertyville (MSL) in 1989, the Village had made annual \$50,000 matching contributions to support the organization’s revitalization work. In 2005, a new mayor and several council members decided to cut their support in half. A further reduction in 2007 reduced the Village contribution to \$10,000. With the losses in these two key revenue sources, year-end projections indicated that the organization would need close to \$60,000 to make it through December. All the Main Street board members were understandably nervous. Without an immediate infusion of cash, the organization would not be able to put on its holiday events and would most likely fold by the end of the year. Pam Hume, then board president, was determined “that MainStreet would not go south on my watch.”





Libertyville: A Snapshot

Located in the northern suburbs of Chicago, Libertyville is a middle-class bedroom community of 21,843, with a late 19th and early 20th century downtown that stretches for five blocks along the spine of Milwaukee Avenue, a state highway.

When MainStreet Libertyville was established in 1989, the downtown was tired, with the typical vacant and underutilized buildings familiar to most new Main Street programs. Scott Adams, a long-time board member and former board chair, remembered those early days in a letter to the editor he sent to the local newspaper: “Over the years,” wrote Adams, “there have been many initiatives to revitalize downtown. Only one has worked, and that is the Main Street concept.”

Over the program’s 18 years, more than \$30 million in private dollars has been invested in downtown, due largely to the heavy lifting of MainStreet Libertyville. By October 2007, downtown looked great. There were interesting new mom-and-pop shops alongside long-time merchants. Rents in 1989 were \$8 to \$9 per square foot, with a 30 percent vacancy rate. By 2007, rents averaged around \$90, with a high of \$126 and a vacancy rate of 2 percent.

During its early years, the MSL board stuck to the Main Street Four-Point Approach[®] with an almost religious fervor. The program created special events and social activities that became highly anticipated community traditions. Each year, MSL volunteers organized 55 days of events that attracted 70,000 people downtown. Noteworthy were the following activities, all eagerly awaited by local residents:

- Farmers’ Market, a much-beloved Thursday morning event during the summer and fall;
- Dickens of a Holiday, a series of shopping and social events held on three Saturdays in December;
- Out to Lunch, a 10-week lunchtime summer concert series held on Fridays;
- Out to Supper with the Village Band, an evening summer concert series;
- Car Fun on 21, a four-week summer Wednesday night event with food vendors, hot rods, vintage cars, and live entertainment; and
- Trick or Treat on Main Street, held at downtown stores that offered treats to kids in costume.



In addition to these events, MSL held one major fund raiser each year, Street Dance, which featured several bands, live and silent auctions, a raffle, program book, and many different sponsors, along with food and beer/wine sales. Throughout the years, MSL board members were proud to point to Street Dance and say to residents – we only come to you once a year to raise funds for our program! But in 2006, the organization made a strategic decision to develop other fund-raising events rather than rely on just one a year; 2006 marked the first year of a new Golf Outing.

As the program reached its 18th year, paid MSL staff included a full-time executive director, a full-time promotion coordinator, and a part-time administrative assistant, along with a roster of 240 volunteers, highly active committees, and a board

of directors that people wanted to join. The approved budget for 2007 was \$205,000; and the organization had a \$100,000 reserve that had been built up over the years through prudent management. Residential membership stood at 439. MSL enjoyed the respect and admiration of its peer revitalization organizations across the state and, by and large, seemed the picture of a healthy, highly successful commercial revitalization organization. So how did this financial crisis happen? (See sidebar “Financial Accountability” on page 11.)

Village Funding Takes a Nose Dive

Several factors besides the rain-out of the Street Dance contributed to MSL’s financial crisis.



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Libertyville's much-beloved Thursday morning Farmers' Market (top) celebrates 30 years with a ceremonial watermelon cutting on Opening Day. Another highly anticipated special event is Dickens of a Holiday (above), held on three Saturdays in December.

A local reporter who broke the story about the organization's financial woes in the *Libertyville Review* in November 2007 wrote: "Some describe MainStreet as a victim of its own success, saying leaders took longtime support from the Village and fund-raising events for granted."

At the start of MainStreet in Libertyville, the Village provided \$50,000 annually from the hotel/motel tax. This sum was cut by half in 2005, cut again to \$15,000 in 2006, and finally in 2007 it was reduced to \$10,000 due to dwindling lodging revenues and sales tax income from auto dealer row (See Sidebar "Village Relationships" on page 12). Despite this clear downward trend in Village funding, the MSL board was unable to plug the increasingly wide hole in their budget with funding from other sources. Instead the board relied on the organization's substantial reserve fund to fill the gap.

"We always feared that the Street Dance would be rained out, but looking back we probably were a little slow to respond to several trends that were beginning to surface," says Rick Pyter, then secretary of the board. "We were also struggling with a very rapid decline in unrestricted corporate contributions. We found that some of our long-term corporate supporters had changed their giving priorities and we no longer fit their profile. We lost several \$10,000 unrestricted donations as a result."

Other budgeting practices might be questioned in retrospect. "Until 2007," says Les Galo, a board member at that time, "a number of promotional events were held at a loss or at best break-even. It was believed that our funding from the Village necessitated that this be done."

Board Treasurer Robert Killackey made it clear during the crisis that the funding

model in use to that point was no longer viable. Killackey insisted that all events generate income or at least break even. "This was not the easiest of transitions," says Galo. "Many event chairs were uncomfortable with the emphasis on money and selling sponsorships for everything."

To respond to the financial crisis, the MSL board took some immediate actions to save cash. They let the promotion coordinator and administrative assistant go, and alerted their landlord that they intended to move to free space offered by a local business person. Randy Nelson, the executive director, was told his last paycheck would be on November 30. He agreed to continue working as a volunteer to see the organization through to the end of the year. (Nelson served as a volunteer for a month, then went back on the payroll in January 2008.)



Mapping a Campaign Strategy

At an emergency meeting in October 2007, the MSL board realized that the only way it could stave off imminent financial collapse was to ask Village residents for their financial support. It was agreed that an aggressive membership campaign would be the quickest way to raise money because donations could come in immediately.

MSL board members and staff mapped out the start of a broad public relations strategy that emphasized weekly communication through a variety of media to tell their story. The first step was to “go public” with the announcement that the organization was in dire financial straits. Nelson and Executive Committee members met with two local newspaper reporters who regularly wrote about the organization. The first articles appeared in the *Daily Herald* and *Libertyville Review* later that week.

The key message the organization wanted to get across initially was that MainStreet Libertyville was not part of the Village government. “Many residents believed our organization was funded through their taxes,” says Galo. This was absolutely not the case.

MSL also focused on the many popular community events and activities in jeopardy of being cancelled. The public relations campaign emphasized community

pride and spirit, including “the picture perfect downtown” that MSL had worked for two decades to achieve. The organization hammered home the message that these beloved events and family traditions would be lost without MainStreet and its volunteer corps.

“We also wanted to counter remarks from newspaper articles that our work was done and that we had achieved our mission,” says Nelson. “This was far from the truth, especially since we knew that a

possible train station redevelopment and new downtown residential plans were in the works. As a mature Main Street organization, we were very proud of what our group had accomplished. We had a great looking downtown with almost no vacan-



Declining Village Funding for MainStreet Libertyville

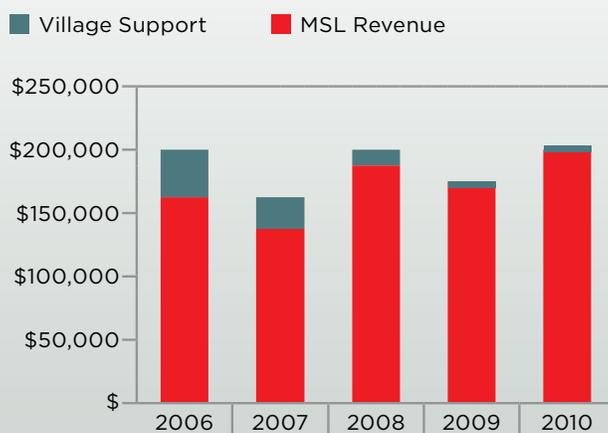
2000-2010



From 2000 to 2010, contributions from the Village of Libertyville fell sharply from \$50,000 a year to \$5,000.

Village of Libertyville Funding for MainStreet Libertyville

Percentage of Total Revenue 2006-2010



From 2006 to 2010, Village support to MSL declined significantly from 15% to just 3% of the organization's total budget.



Once MainStreet Libertyville's sole fund raiser, Street Dance now brings in \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year instead of \$60,000, but is balanced by other fund-raising events. Vendors (far left), volunteers (top left), and residents (left) enjoy this fun September evening.

© Studio West Photography

cies, but we needed to manage it to make sure it stayed that way. Plus we wanted to keep things buzzing with our 17 volunteer-run events that kept a steady stream of people coming downtown.”

The membership campaign got off to a slow but sure start. Within two weeks of the initial plea, 42 new residential memberships came in, ranging in amount from \$40 to \$100. “We always knew we had a core of support,” said Nelson in an interview with the *Daily Herald*.

With this initial vote of confidence, the MSL board decided to devote an entire issue of its quarterly newsletter, *The Gazette*, to the fund-raising effort. Mailed out in mid-November, it was sent to every business and residential address in Libertyville’s zip code, a total of 12,500 pieces.

In her cover letter, Board President Pam Hume emphasized the community and family traditions and the memories that MainStreet events created for residents. She stressed that the organization’s goal was to continue these events, but warned that “the organization cannot do so without increased financial support from local residents and businesses.”

Meanwhile, Nelson and Rick Pyter further developed their PR strategy. “We wanted to have something happening every week so that residents would hear about our plight through many different channels” says Pyter. Besides the good rapport the organization had with the two local newspapers, MSL used a variety of other communication channels to inform residents about the need for support. These methods included:

- School backpack stuffers sent home with all elementary and junior high school students;
- Bag stuffers used by all downtown merchants;
- An event schedule reprinted with a “How to Join” section;
- Appearances on local talk radio;
- Speeches to public service groups like Rotary, Kiwanis, the Senior Center, homeowners associations; and
- A special MSL e-newsletter stressing the urgency of the need.

Every stuffer and handout was color coded to track the effectiveness of the

wording, and the message was constantly revised based on this testing. “We tried to make the messages consistent and focused on the potential loss of ‘the sizzle’ – the events – with a smaller portion about preservation of the organization,” says Nelson.

The Green Envelopes

After the first news story hit, Jack Martin, a well-known and sometimes controversial local business owner and activist, walked into the MSL office with an idea to raise money. He wanted to send letters to every taxpayer asking for emergency financial support for MainStreet. A few days later he came back with a letter he had written. The package included some press clippings and a green envelope with MainStreet Libertyville’s address printed on it. The package was sent to Martin’s list of registered voters in the Village. This was done “on his own dime” and was said to cost more than \$6,000. Martin’s letter, dated November 23, 2007, proved to be a highly successful idea and the green envelopes began to pour in by the end of the year.



That same week, a local real estate agency, Century 21 Kreuser & Seiler, placed a full page “Open Letter to All Libertyville Area Residents” in the *Libertyville Review*. “Any Realtor in Libertyville,” said the letter, “can tell you that our fine schools, our beautiful downtown, and the sense of community you feel just passing through our town are what attract prospective homebuyers to Libertyville (and help sustain our home values).”

“For any new, non-business membership, renewal, or donation between November 22 and January 31, 2008,” the letter stated that “Century 21 Kreuser and Seiler [would] make a matching contribution of up to an aggregate on our part of \$10,000.”

An anonymous donor also offered to match up to \$2,500 in a “Residents Matching Fund,” thus permitting new members to essentially triple their donations during the critical weeks before and after the holidays.

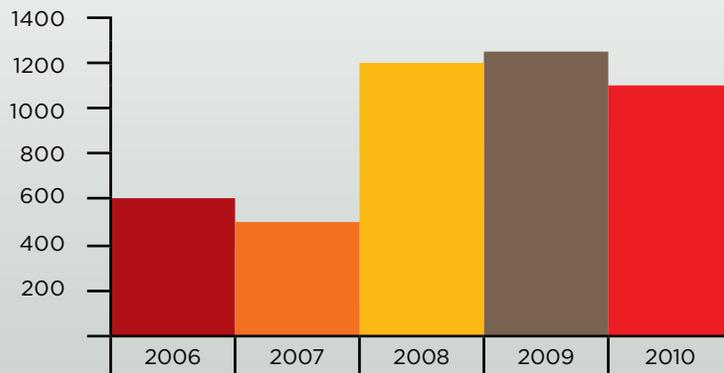
On December 12, 2007, MSL Director Randy Nelson sent the *Daily Herald* a Letter to the Editor bringing everyone up to date. Six weeks into the membership drive, 140 new members had come forward. Nelson’s letter helped counter other rumors that had been swarming. “I am proud to say that MainStreet has proved to be a very astute business investment,” wrote Nelson. “Village government’s \$800,000 over 18 years has produced \$30 million in private-sector investment, a remarkably successful investment by any count.” Nelson also described the board’s effort to cut expenses, and move offices “to make your dollars go further toward keeping the organization alive.” He warned “the bottom line is that we have great momentum, but we still have a considerable way to go.”

As the new membership checks came in each day, Pyter and Nelson deposited the money and entered the information into the database. Board President Pam Hume volunteered in the office every day to keep the events and normal functions of the office in hand. “She was the glue that kept us afloat during those critical months,” said Pyter. A recent retiree from a large corporation, Pyter also spent countless hours in the MSL office during the crisis.

With the two challenge grants ending on January 31, 2008, it was time to total up the results. At a press conference on February 22, 2008, Century 21 presented both a large symbolic and the actual \$10,000 check in fulfillment of its challenge to residents to support MainStreet

Total Number of Main Street Libertyville Members

2006-2010



MainStreet Libertyville’s membership tripled from 439 in 2007 to 1,116 in 2008.

Libertyville. The anonymous donor also made a \$2,500 matching pledge.

An editorial in the *Daily Herald* that day announced that “residents and businesses had donated more than \$88,000 to the nonprofit organization since November 1. Membership had tripled to 1,116, giving the group that had for a time operated without any paid employees some breathing room and a rejuvenated sense of purpose.” Another article noted that “new memberships provided the bulk of the new funds.”

The MSL board set a new goal to get another 400 members to join by July 1, 2008, to stabilize the organization’s operations. The bulk of the memberships came in late December and throughout January, with green envelopes still trickling in as late as April, noted Hume.

So We Have 1,116 Members, Now What?

No one really expected MainStreet Libertyville to retain all 1,116 members when it came time to renew them in 2008. “We were all aware that this number was going to fall off. It was as high as it was because people responded to the financial emergency. Once the emergency was over, some people would feel that they had done their part and would not renew,” says Galo. Tracking the renewal of each donor was essential for success.

MSL’s first step was to set an \$80,000 goal for renewals, upgrades, and new members. This sum was viewed as realistic given the outpouring of support and likely

falloff of members. Instead, membership numbers grew in 2009. The database proved to be an important component in the renewal process because it could merge and customize renewal letters and envelopes, and tally results monthly. Monthly renewals also helped maintain the organization’s cash flow.

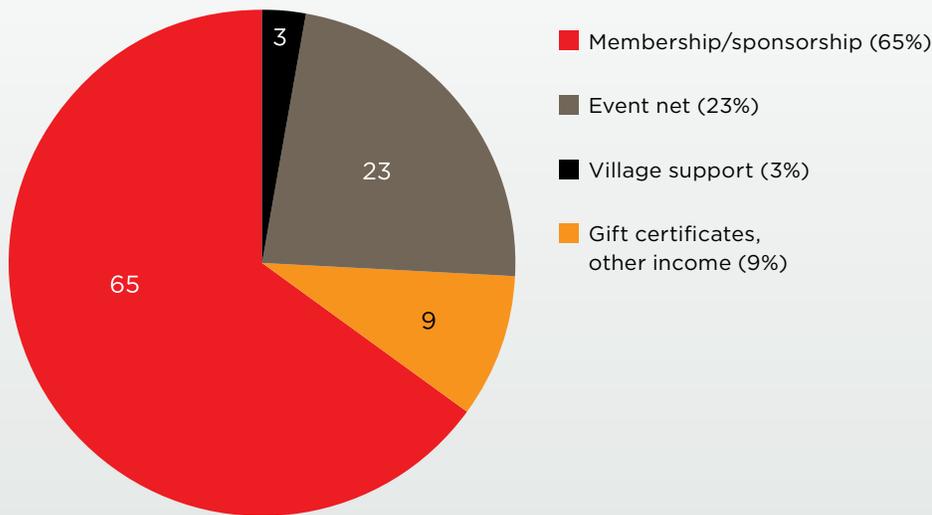
Next, MSL staff segmented the membership based on the size of the donation. The 74 residents who donated \$250 or more (representing 30 percent of MSL’s total membership revenue) received a call or visit from a board member. “We knew most of these people already, as they were former board members, merchants, property owners, and others who were keen on our success” says Hume. “Volunteers handwrote thank you notes to every person who joined, which was an enormous task.”

Another significant membership segment consisted of 343 residents who gave at the \$100 level. These folks clearly loved the MainStreet program and gave far above the minimum donation to help ensure that the events and activities would continue. These donations also represented 33 percent of the total membership revenue. MSL used a multi-channel method to renew these members: an e-mail message if an e-mail address was provided; three letters; and a phone call from an organization committee member after the first renewal letter was sent. This multi-channel renewal method was a successful tactic that drove more renewals.

For the 657 residents who gave less than \$100, MSL set up a system of three renewal

2009 MainStreet Libertyville Revenue

MSL 2009 revenue totaled \$179,229.

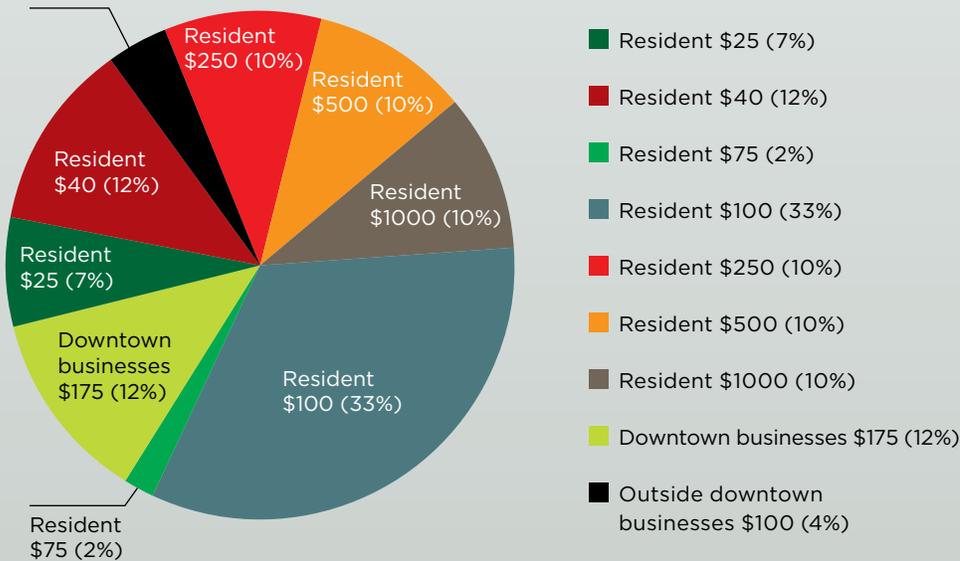


In 2009, membership represented 65% of MainStreet Libertyville's total revenue. Membership dues have since declined to 45% of total revenue in 2010.

Breakdown of 2008 Membership Revenue

2008 membership revenue totaled \$105,690.

Outside downtown businesses
\$100 (4%)



MainStreet Libertyville's big membership drive in 2007 brought in more than \$100,000 in revenue. A third of the funds came from \$100 donations from 343 residents.



Financial Accountability

While the membership campaign was in the works, “community members were asking how MainStreet got into this situation” recalled former board member Les Galo. “To respond to these questions an ad hoc committee of prominent members of the community and former board members was formed to determine the answers to these questions and guide MainStreet through the crisis and into the future.”

Jack Martin, the business owner who mailed the green envelope appeal to all the voters of Libertyville, was instrumental in forming a Financial Advisory Committee. MSL had always been audited and was already transparent, says Pam Hume; but this committee would help counter rumors and Village concerns. The ad hoc committee “examined our financial statements for the previous seven years,” says Galo. “They satisfied themselves that all transactions had been in order and that nothing illegal or unethical had taken place.”

MJ Seiler, a Financial Advisory Committee member and founding board member, commented in a news article that “the expenses were never the problem. It’s always the revenue side.” The committee, Seiler wrote, wanted to make sure that “MainStreet is on a solid financial footing and prevent this from happening again.”



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© Bob Killackey

Two new fund-raising events have grown in popularity over the past two years. The 2010 5th Annual Golf Outing (far right) was a sellout with 144 golfers and net revenue of \$11,000, while the “Let’s Wine About Winter” (right and far right top) is one of MSL’s most popular retail events.

Village Relationships

The Village’s annual contribution of \$50,000 represented close to 15 percent of MainStreet Libertyville’s operating funds. Village President Duane Laska was a big MSL fan, and while he remained in office, MSL could count on continued village support. But when Laska decided not to pursue reelection in 2004, MSL board members worried about what would happen. Concerns were raised in October 2003 when four MSL board members, including the president, resigned “out of concern about the group’s handling of its finances and its level of professionalism.” Most of this revolved around staff salaries, even though they were comparable to similar Main Street organizations nearby. In a newspaper article about the fiscal crisis, a Village Trustee noted that “at one time the group had a \$100,000 cushion in the bank and the Street Dance brought in \$65,000.” So when one of the MSL board members who resigned was elected as a Village Trustee, MainStreet knew there might be budget repercussions.

letters. A renewal letter went out a month before the lapse date; another letter was sent on the anniversary date of joining, and a final “good-bye” letter was mailed out the month after the lapse. While this was the largest group of members, their donations represented only 21 percent of the program’s total membership revenue in 2007.

Revising the MSL Budget

According to Les Galo, who was serving as MainStreet board president in 2008, the “new emphasis on membership fund raising was good but the amount of money coming in was not enough. More fund raisers were needed.”

The organization could no longer pin its hopes on one fund raiser a year – the Street Dance – to bring in a third of its budget. We needed a variety of fund-raising events during different seasons of the year, says Galo. “First, a wine-tasting event was held to great social and financial success. Jack Martin of green envelope fame hosted a wine tasting event in February of 2008, raising almost \$8,700.”

Held in June 2006, the first golf outing produced modest results, but it has grown

MainStreet Libertyville Budget

Yearly budget and membership

■ Total Revenue ■ Membership Revenue



MainStreet Libertyville depends heavily on memberships. Membership revenues amounted to 45% of MainStreet Libertyville's total budget in 2010.



© Bob Killackey



© Pam Hume

in popularity over the past two years. In 2010 it was held for the fifth time and all 144 golf spots sold out two weeks before the event. "With the sponsorships sold and the number of golfers maxed out," says Galo, the event "is a terrific money maker for us at \$11,000."

Another event, organized by Rick Pyter's daughter, Stephanie Herbek, involved the local running community in raising funds for Main Street: The first 5 kilometer race was held on Labor Day Sunday in 2008. Like the golf outing, the race achieved greater success in its second year, bringing in \$20,000 from 800 runners in 2009. MSL views this fund-raising event as having great potential since a virtually unlimited number of people and families can participate.

The Street Dance still takes place every September, but it no longer brings in the substantial sums of the past. "We count on between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in net proceeds a year from it now," says Hume.

Sponsorships are still a vital revenue source as a component of income from special events. Seventy-five local businesses along Milwaukee Avenue are loyal members, and give annual membership gifts of \$175

yearly. About 45 businesses outside the downtown are associate members at \$100. Last year MSL reviewed the benefit structure for both business and associate members.

As of April 30, 2010, the end of MSL's fiscal year, the program had raised \$76,648 from 954 residential members. This sum is very close to the \$80,000 goal set in 2008. Residential membership has amounted to 45 percent of the organization's total budget of \$200,205. Residential membership gifts to MSL are purely charitable donations, and members receive very limited personal benefits for joining; there are no tee shirts, mugs, coupon books, or other premiums. Each year the organization committee reviews the membership categories to provide new or upgraded giving opportunities, says Hume.

Thanks to and recognition of members occur in several ways. The names of all members are printed in one issue of *The Gazette* which is delivered to every household in the Village. All members get a formal thank-you letter, while those who donate at the \$250 level or higher get a personal handwritten note on their letter. All donors at \$500 or above get personal telephone calls of thanks from the board chair.

Born out of necessity, the actions to address MainStreet Libertyville's financial crisis over the last three years have remade the organization. The organization's suc-

cessful move away from government funding now forces it to rely on residents for the vast majority of support from memberships, fund-raising events, and special event proceeds. As a mature organization, MSL has long provided quality events that residents love, but few people actually knew who produced them. Now everyone knows what MainStreet Libertyville does. Although downtown looks great, Village officials realize that MSL's work is not done. While the organization's turnaround was sparked by a funding crisis, it also provided an ideal public relations opportunity to explain why MainStreet Libertyville provides value to the community and its residents.

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting, Inc. (www.heritageconsultinginc.com), a Philadelphia-based consulting firm that specializes in downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation, and organizational development. Formerly the state coordinator of Illinois Main Street, Ms. Harris is a Certified Main Street Manager and speaks and consults on Main Street topics nationwide. Contact her at donna@heritageconsultinginc.com. She is a Main Street Network Allied member; for more information, see her listing at http://alliedirectory.mainstreet.org/listing/heritage_consulting_inc.html.



How to Use This Case Study

By Donna Ann Harris

With \$90,125 of a \$200,205 budget coming from 1,192 individual members, and fund-raising event proceeds adding another 46 percent, MainStreet Libertyville claimed in its renewal letters that it raised “over 98 percent of our budget through private contributions.” Residents clearly supported the continuation of all the community’s cherished MainStreet events and traditions with their own dollars.

While most Main Street organizations begin their existence expecting only one-third of their budget to come from membership, in my experience, members – or investors or supporters, if you choose to call them that – represent an untapped opportunity to provide stability for a local program. I suspect few Main Street organizations rely as heavily on residential members to meet payroll each month as MainStreet Libertyville (MSL) does. MSL is like many other local revitalization organizations that are seeing their governmental and grant support decline. Because local programs cannot control government or grant funding sources, they should instead focus on revenue sources they can control, such as fund-raising events, special events, and especially membership for the majority of their budget, in order to diversify their funding.

Why focus on membership?

Each year, the Giving USA Foundation charts philanthropic donations in the United States. Recently released statistics say giving dropped by 3.6 percent in 2009 to \$303.75 billion. Still, Giving USA reports that the largest sector of donations was from individuals who donated more than 74 percent of all gifts to charity. Given these statistics, Main Street organizations should renew and upgrade their pitch to individuals because they are the ones who continue to make the vast majority of philanthropic donations both large and small.

Expand your membership base

Membership is one of the three Main Street revenue sources entirely controlled by the organization (the other two are fund raisers and special events). The amount of time and effort you spend on a good membership campaign will reap lasting rewards. Libertyville’s success relies mostly on the organization’s personal approach to raising funds.

In 2007, Libertyville residents were literally bombarded over a four-month period with appeals sent home in their children’s backpacks; inside their shopping bags if they patronized local shops; in e-mail messages; from a speaker at the Rotary breakfast; from a local radio talk show; through numerous articles in the two local newspapers and in the *Chicago Tribune*; from a speaker at their homeown-



© Studio West Photography

ers association; in a letter from a local business person, and from the quarterly MSL newsletter sent to each home. Of the 12,500 households in town, more than 10 percent of all families became dues-paying members of MSL to keep the events they loved alive. MainStreet Libertyville was able to show that it provided real value for its members' investment.

A large membership base is an excellent barometer of success. Members essentially "vote" on how your organization is doing with their checkbooks or credit cards each time they participate in an event, buy a raffle ticket, use a MainStreet gift certificate, bid on an auction item at a fund-raising event, or renew their membership. A large membership roll means there are many more people to invite to events and more upper-end donors to cultivate during the year for additional gifts. All members have the potential to give more if they are asked to upgrade their gifts when they renew. Members can also be invited to support other worthy individual or special projects during the year.

Your group will enjoy more clout with elected officials if it has 1,400 members instead of 400. But if individual memberships represent close to half of your annual budget, the renewal and recognition process becomes ever more critical for the continued health of the organization. Membership renewal must be taken seriously and focus on the numbers.

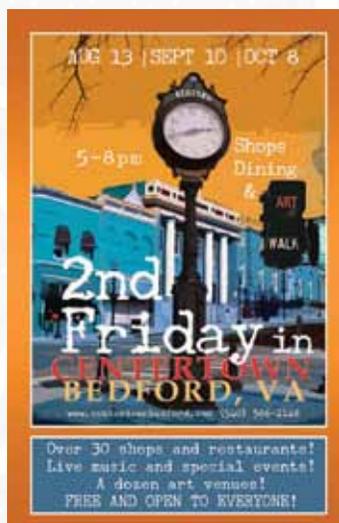
TOP 10

There are many lessons to be learned from MainStreet Libertyville's financial crisis. Here is my top 10 list.

1. Diversify your revenue sources.
2. Reduce your dependence on government funds by turning to residents for support.
3. Chart your revenue yearly and compare it to previous years so board members can easily see trends forming.
4. Spread fund-raising events throughout the year instead of relying on just one event.
5. Review your membership levels and increase or change some categories each year.
6. Ask members once or twice a year to give to a special project.
7. All special events must make money or at least break even.
8. Do not make fund-raising events dependent on good weather.
9. Tell people about your good work through a public relations campaign.
10. Even mature organizations must explain their value to all of their constituents.



Bold Dominion:



Virginia's Quarter-Century Communities Lengthen Their Strides

By Douglas Jackson, Virginia Main Street

During its 25 years as a Main Street community, Bedford, Virginia, has provided its historic district with careful stewardship. Well-tended storefronts speak to the pride of merchants and property owners. On one street, there's a new mural, while another boasts a new wayfinding sign. Improvements are incremental and ongoing.



© Kathleen Frazier, Frazier Associates

Far left: Located near Bedford, Smith Mountain Lake attracts many visitors who come to the downtown for the farmers' market and weekend events. Left: Staunton, Virginia, streetscape

The narrow streets of this county seat slope with the hills of the Blue Ridge, and looking out at them, Bedford Main Street President Ginger Bell appears thoughtful. “The work’s never done,” she says. “Even if we achieve our mission, we’ll have to maintain it,” the antiques dealer adds with a smile. “That’s the nature of our work.”

Simply stated, determination like that can serve a Main Street program well, and in the land affectionately nicknamed “Old Dominion” for its loyalty to England in the 1600s, that steadfastness might be part of the culture in Virginia communities. But the Main Street Four-Point Approach® is also about challenging current conditions and conventional economic development strategies, and that can feel a bit riskier.

In the end, you’ve got to deliver

Bedford’s weekend events enliven the farmers’ market and a small central plaza, attracting residents and visitors who hike the Peaks of Otter, tour the National D-Day Memorial, and relax at nearby Smith Mountain Lake. Yet Dan Plattus, Bedford Main Street program manager, has had to work hard to encourage business owners to

keep stores open during the hours convenient for most shoppers. “We’re in their stores on a regular basis,” says Plattus. “Lately it seems like every day.”

Bedford is one of only three designated communities that have participated in the Virginia Main Street program since it was established in 1985. Unsurprisingly, the city experienced both highs and lows during that time, and a stretch in early 2009 spent without a paid program manager created a gap during which the merchants and some longstanding board members disinvested.

The organization restructured a year ago and now it’s working hard to prove again that the Main Street Approach – when done right – works. The merchant community is a primary stakeholder group in downtown districts, and given that most Bedford businesses are sole proprietorships, the group of busy entrepreneurs can be difficult to bring together, much less *act* together.

Yet on a recent Friday night, 30 out of 36 retail and restaurant merchants, responding to the requests of board members and program staff, stayed open late as part of a *Second Fridays* after-hours event (see sidebar *Dan’s Tips* on page 18 to encourage your business owners to stay open late, too).

“Getting that participation was something to celebrate,” says Bell. “It took a lot of repeated communication and a little risk. First we had to stick our neck out a little and assure folks that yes, this would work. Merchants invested both time and money in the effort. Then we had to get aggressive with our marketing to make it happen.”

Billboard advertising of the district on an adjacent state highway, radio, and print advertising for the event, and cooperative print advertising of the merchants are bringing new visitors to town and store owners have responded to the new energy. At the second monthly event, 29 stores stayed open.

Creating a place of opportunity

Six counties to the east, the city of Franklin pursues the Main Street Approach in a very different setting. The hills have flattened in a long stretch toward the sandy coast, and from the edge of town, the Blackwater River provides a quick link to North Carolina’s Albemarle Sound and the Atlantic Ocean. Until recently, this was paper country; in April, the International Paper Company closed a plant that employed 1,100 people.

Dan's Tips: Working with Merchants to Extend Store Hours

Put personal energy and enthusiasm behind the effort.

Many efforts die at the idea stage, perhaps adding to a pile of empty promises. To engage merchants effectively, you have to have a sense of commitment. When a district tries something new, you don't just stick your neck out a little, you thrust it out there. Business owners have to know that you're going to do everything in your power to make it happen and make it succeed.

Engage merchant leaders up front.

Ask a few opinion makers to sign up early. Encourage them to talk to others, and let them know you'll be dropping their names when encouraging others. It's an important way they can demonstrate their leadership.

Commit to a series.

Build a reliability factor into the strategy. By committing to do our extended hours on every second Friday for at least six months, we were able to advertise them all at once and give some time for word of mouth to spread.

Spread news from store to store.

Because all of the merchants are in the stores during the main part of the event, it's important that someone walk through the district and touch base with each merchant. It helps build excitement and share what's happening out on the streets.

Measure the outcome of activities.

Survey both merchants and visitors from the start. Find out what attracted visitors and how businesses fared. A raffle helps encourage visitors to answer questions.

Tweak it.

Use the survey information to make changes from event to event. It will improve outcomes and demonstrate commitment to the event's success.

Celebrate at closing time.

Arrange for a restaurant to host a special event for visitors to the district and merchants. This helps reinforce the community-building aspect of the event.

By Dan Plattus, Bedford Main Street Manager

The lifeblood of the community throughout the 20th century, the mill employed more than 3,000 people in the late 1990s. That's a lot of jobs in a community of just over 8,000 people.

People in Franklin aren't the type to wave white flags, having rebuilt in the last decade after a devastating flood caused by Hurricane Floyd. The river crested at historic heights and put downtown Franklin awash.

Rebuilding a job base means a new approach, according to Downtown Franklin Association, Inc., Board Member Nancy Parrish. "We've been living in the shadow of the paper mill in more ways than one," says Parrish. "With the mill and the jobs that came with it, there was a welcome stability. Losing that, we recognize that our future looks much different than our past, so, like a lot of places in the country, we're trying to renew a sense of entrepreneurship. We see our role now as helping the community make that cultural shift."

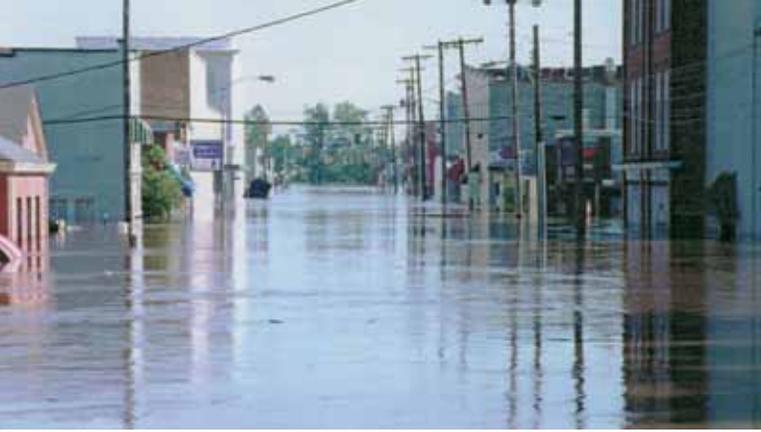
Parrish is the small business development manager for the town's business incubator, which is housed in a historic four-story brick building built in 1907 as a buggy factory. After subsequent uses for screen door and window manufacturing and peanut storage, the building is now home to 28 emerging companies, and of the seven companies that have graduated from the space, three have opened downtown Franklin locations. "Our goal now," says Parrish, "is to focus on micro-entrepreneurs – the skilled workers who have an idea or hobby that they're passionate about and willing to do the hard work that it takes to start a business."

In July, Virginia Main Street convened the statewide network in Franklin for a focused look at strategies to create a vibrant marketplace downtown. The event, *Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Downtown*, brought together the knowledge of the 21 designated Virginia Main Street communities and representatives of many of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's 75 commercial district affiliates. National Trust Main Street Center economic restructuring expert Todd Barman challenged participants to consider how they attract not just businesses but entrepreneurs.

"To attract entrepreneurs and investors to your district you need to sell them on their ability to become part of a successful place," Barman told the group. "The bottom line is that they will need to become confident in their ability to make money and earn

Bedford Main Street President Ginger Bell and Main Street Manager Dan Plattus have worked hard to get downtown merchants to extend their business hours.





The people of Franklin, Va., are a sturdy breed. It's been 10 years since Hurricane Floyd flooded the community with more than 10 feet of water. Residents rebuilt their town but are now facing another crisis, with the loss of a plant that employed 1,000 people.

Online Resources to Support Micro-Enterprises

Many communities have access to resource organizations that provide loans, training, and technical assistance to very small businesses. Employing between one and five full-time workers in equivalent positions, businesses in this category are identified as micro-enterprises. For more information on micro-enterprise development strategies, check out the following organizations:

- Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO): www.aeoworks.org.
- Virginia Microenterprise Network (VMN): www.vamicro.org.
- Center for Rural Entrepreneurship: www.ruraleship.org.

a return on their investment. Providing a compelling vision of a fully functioning future marketplace will help. Engaging everyone in working toward that shared vision is what Main Street programs do.”

Virginia Main Street Coordinator Jeff Sadler believes that the renewed focus on the entrepreneur is timely. “The community-based groups leading Main Street efforts tend to get pigeon holed, most typically as event producers,” Sadler says, “but there’s an important aspect to their efforts that should be encouraging entrepreneurial and investment activity.”

In Franklin that effort is taking shape in the form of a collaborative strategy to provide technical assistance, training, and a micro-loan fund for the town and surrounding Southampton County. The strategy is funded in part with a small planning grant from the Virginia Enterprise Initiative

(VEI). The state-funded program supports organizations that provide training, technical assistance, and loans to businesses with one to five employees. Like Virginia’s Main Street program, it is housed within the Department of Housing and Community Development and managed by Sadler, who has restructured the program in the past year to extend its support to very small businesses seeking locations in Main Street communities.

While Franklin’s efforts to foster a culture of entrepreneurship are still developing, an engaged and talkative crowd at the weekly summer concert down by the river stands as testimony to commitment to the place. “It’s our community, our home,” says resident and Downtown Franklin, Inc., Executive Director Dan Howe, “and it’s a city worth investing in.”

Through a small business incubator managed by Main Street Board Member Nancy Parrish (bottom) and located in a former buggy factory (below), Franklin is focusing on “micro-entrepreneurs” to revive its economy. The incubator is home to 28 emerging companies.





Dedicated as Virginia's first pedestrian mall in 1974, the Loudoun Street Mall in Winchester, Va., spans four city blocks at the center of a 45-block historic district.



The Union Jack Pub, located in a restored 1878 Victorian cast-iron building, is one of the businesses helping to create a vibrant, mixed-use district along the Loudoun Street Mall.

Sample Recommendations from the Winchester Downtown Living report

1. Maximize the use of existing tax incentives as well as other incentives, such as loans and public/private partnerships.
2. Improve the perceived security and safety of both the primary and secondary areas through community policing, lighting improvements, and public relations outreach.
3. Prepare a general schematic/concept plan for the focus area that identifies opportunities for the desired types of development on specific parcels.
4. For underutilized publicly owned properties and larger institutional properties like downtown church parking lots, prepare detailed plans that establish specific incentives for potential development scenarios.
5. Create a sense of place or an identity for the Old Town Neighborhood District. Express community identity and provide for community social life in the public realm through beautification, street art, pocket parks, and unique styles of lighting and signage. Sidewalks must effectively become the living rooms of the neighborhood.

Renewing the mix on the mall

For Winchester, a city of 26,000 at the top of the Shenandoah Valley, new district energy comes in the form of a coordinated strategy to promote the development of housing along one of the nation's few remaining pedestrian malls.

The Loudoun Street Mall, dedicated as Virginia's first pedestrian mall in 1974, spans four city blocks at the center of a 45-block historic district and incorporates four lots that have centered the town since the early 1700s.

The mall project replaced a problematic stormwater drainage system, ending the flooding of downtown stores, and incorporated aesthetic improvements, including the removal of overhead wires and signs. Ten years of planning and stakeholder engagement culminated in the addition of landscaping and street furniture to create Virginia's first pedestrian mall.

"Just like other pedestrian malls across the country, ours has struggled over the years," says Old Town Development Board President Kimberly Sowers, "but in the past five years, we've started to see some remarkable successes. While taking cars off the street may have been a way of segregating uses, the reintroduction of housing on the Loudoun Street Mall can be seen as a way of mixing it up again. We're facilitating a true mixed-use district. For Winchester, now it's not a question of cars or no cars, but of a vibrant 24-hour community with a mix

of uses or just more of the same struggles. To do nothing would be to go backward in the revitalization of our downtown."

The Old Town Development Board (OTDB) – the city's Main Street program– supported recent amendments to the city's zoning ordinance and residential density standards to encourage housing development in and around the downtown area. "Removing the barrier of the cumbersome conditional use permit that used to be required for any housing development on the mall was a major step in encouraging property owners to consider residential development," says OTDB Executive Director Karen Helm. Helm contributed to the city's fall 2009 report, *Promoting Residential Living in Downtown Winchester*, which identified additional challenges and recommendations to be addressed (see the *Sample Recommendations sidebar* at left).

Despite the national economic downturn, the market is responding to Winchester's push for downtown housing. Two of the mall's key historic landmark buildings have been rehabbed to accommodate second- and third-floor upscale housing. Constructed more than 130 years ago, the Weaver and Lovett buildings have been vacant or under-utilized for at least 40 years. Collectively, their rehabilitation has added 13 architecturally unique apartments, each with modern amenities, to downtown living.

In addition to historic luxury residences, Winchester has welcomed new construction that complements the mall's historic structures.



Many buildings along the Loudoun Street Mall are being rehabbed to accommodate second- and third-floor upscale housing. The renovation of two century-old buildings on the mall has added 13 architecturally unique apartments to the downtown.

One infill residential project offers fully furnished single-bedroom units on short-term leases, with a target market of business people moving to the area.

Students will be moving in as well. The next project slated for the mall is the rehabilitation of a historic hardware store building that has been empty since 1993. Shenandoah University will purchase the building, oversee the historic tax credit project, and house up to 35 adult students. “This will bring a vibrant, young population downtown,” says Winchester City Council President Jeff Buettner. “And that hopefully is the catalyst that brings about filling up some of our empty storefronts along the pedestrian mall.”

Helm says that the ongoing effort is just part of a larger strategy. In addition to removing residential development barriers and painting a picture of the kind of development the community wants to see, Winchester has converted surrounding one-way streets to two lanes of traffic after 40 years of hurrying people along. “Now we’re focused on being more inviting,” says Helm. “It means good things for the district, and it’s a responsibility. We’re attracting investors and residents with the promise of a high quality of life in a downtown setting.”

A measure of maturity

Collectively, these three communities have 75 years of experience pursuing the Main Street Approach. Does that make it easier? Well, yes and no, says Sadler. “Main Street

“Virginia has a very collaborative network—there are no trade secrets. They share ideas, policies, and details of how they get things done.”

Virginia Main Street at a Glance

Established	1985
Designated communities	21
Cumulative Statistics	
Created, retained, and expanded	
businesses to date:	4,926
Jobs to date:	14,589
Volunteer hours since 1997:	615,206
Rehabilitation projects	6,183
Private sector investment in current dollars	\$638.5 million
Public investment	\$287.5 million

is an ongoing stewardship of these special places. Each of these communities has celebrated some big accomplishments. But periodically, every community relaxes the pace and rides on its momentum. Naturally, when they get to that comfortable plateau, they take smaller steps.”

Even a program that’s been around for a quarter of a century has to do a reality check when progress stalls. They have to ask: what are we accomplishing? What could we do to really advance the health of the district? In a very real sense, what’s the next big leap?

In Bedford, the answer is a full-press grassroots merchant re-engagement effort. In Franklin, the community is rallying around the potential of entrepreneurship, coordinating a strategic approach to provide training and capital to former plant workers. And a community vision for upper-story housing in Winchester promises a revitalization of the state’s oldest pedestrian mall.

The Virginia Main Street state coordinating team sees its role as one of encouragement, and that supportive push comes in a couple of different ways. “We do a lot just by providing a space for the program managers and board members to learn from each other,” says staff member Kyle Meyer. “Virginia has a very collaborative network – there are no trade secrets. They share ideas, policies, and details of how they get things done.”

The second way, Sadler says, is in the designation process. “The National Trust Main Street Center has provided a model, and it’s actually our job to hold the communities to it,” says Sadler. “This year, we broke down the designation criteria and created a scoring matrix so that the process is more transparent. We use it now as a communication tool to have open discussions with community leaders so they can see how they might take their own next big step. We weren’t sure how folks would take it, but there is great power in opening conversation with critical thinking.”

When opportunity allows, Sadler also works to line up incentive resources for these more aggressive strategies. “We try to provide incentives for the programs to think big and develop an extraordinary project with additional resources from our agency (the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development) or others.” This spring Virginia Main Street gave seven designated communities competitively awarded Downtown Improvement Grants – \$2,500 in recognition of Virginia Main Street’s 25th anniversary.

Some of the bigger steps made by other Virginia communities have been strategic responses to the particular challenges of today’s economy – something almost every community faces. Rocky Mount addressed the economic downturn with a town-funded shop-local incentive called “5 on Us,” in

which a five-dollar discount voucher could be used on purchases of \$25 or more at participating local merchants. Staunton strategically encouraged street performers and musicians both as part of formal programs and by making the community more open to them as a way to create energy in the district. And Harrisonburg developed a business retention team to provide hands-on, short-term technical assistance to struggling and fledgling entrepreneurs.

Of course, these districts continue their traditional events, façade programs, and community-building activities. But trying to accomplish more, especially after pursuing revitalization strategies for two and a half decades, means taking longer strides and more risks. And that’s just what mature programs do. Baby steps – or simply carrying out the same activities year after year – can only get you so far.

Doug Jackson lives and writes in Roanoke, Virginia. A member of the Virginia Main Street staff, he enjoys working with program managers and community volunteers throughout the commonwealth, all doing their part to enhance their unique places in the world.

Additional Information and Resources from Virginia Main Street:

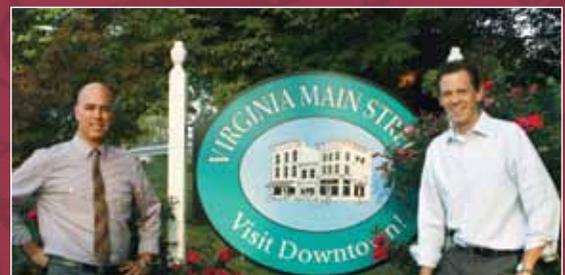
Virginia Main Street Website: www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet

Visit the website for more information on the Virginia Main Street program:

- Program Design
- Training Archives
- 2009 Annual Report
- Virginia Main Street Driving Tour
- Virginia Main Street Monitor Technical Brief

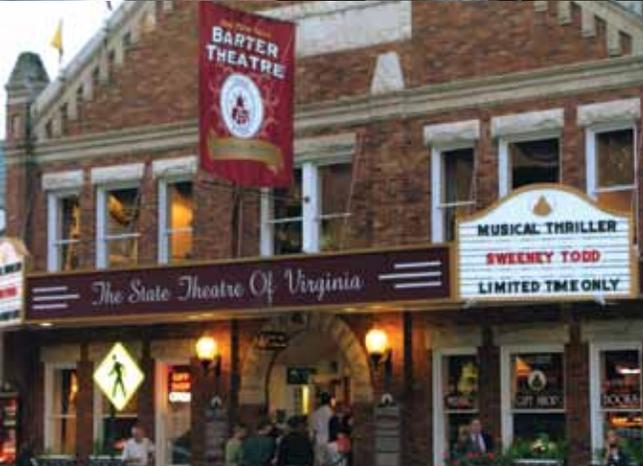
Virginia Main Street Blog: www.dhcdvms.wordpress.com

Visit the Virginia Main Street Blog for the latest updates on downtown entrepreneurship and strategies employed in Virginia Main Street communities, as well as links to program websites of all 21 communities. Subscribe to the blog or sign up for an RSS feed for consistent and frequent updates.



Virginia Main Street staffers Kyle Meyer (left) and Doug Jackson (right) pose before the Virginia Main Street sign in Abingdon, Va.

25 *Top Virginia Main Street Destinations*



Three national landmark showplaces

- Barter Theater, Abingdon
- Lincoln Theater, Marion
- Blackfriar's Playhouse, Staunton

Five top spots for arts and crafts

- William King Museum, Abingdon
- Fire House Gallery and Shop, Berryville
- The Center for the Arts of Greater Manassas at the Candy Factory
- Virginia Quilt Museum, Harrisonburg
- The Prizery, South Boston

Six historical highlights

- Schwartz Tavern, Blackstone
- A.P. Hill Boyhood Home, Culpeper
- James Madison Museum, Orange
- Waynesboro Heritage Museum
- Old Jail Museum, Warrenton
- Bedford City and County Museum

Five historic hotels for a night's rest

- Martha Washington Hotel and Spa, Abingdon
- Mimslyn Inn, Luray
- George Washington Hotel, Winchester
- Stonewall Jackson Hotel, Staunton
- General Francis Marion Hotel, Marion

Four riverfront parks

- English Park, Altavista
- Barrett's Landing Riverfront Park, Franklin
- Radford's Bisset Park
- Lynchburg's James River Heritage Trail Riverwalk

Two standout claims

- The Big Chair, Martinsville
- Gateway to the Crooked Road, Rocky Mount

And one to grow on!

- Farmer's Markets

www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet

HANDLE WITH CARE

WASHINGTON, MISSOURI, FINDS NEW USES FOR DOWNTOWN POST OFFICE



Gayla Roten, State Director,
Missouri Main Street Connection

Vacant buildings do nothing to enhance the heart of a city. The downtown, the historic core of most communities, typically has many historically significant buildings that highlight local history and heritage.

When the United States Postal Service decided to close the Old Main Post Office in Washington, Missouri, to offset financial losses, Downtown Washington, Inc., (DWI) and its sister organization, the Historic Washington Foundation (HWF), took action to prevent another vacancy in their downtown.

“The Old Main Post Office project is critical to our economic development efforts downtown,” says Richard Hopp, president of HWF. “But more than that, it fulfills our mission of maximizing the use of historic buildings.”

Acquiring the Old Main Post Office not only prevented the abandonment of a viable historic structure, but also retained postal services and employment in the downtown area.

“We couldn’t be more excited,” Bridgette Epple, executive director of DWI, said when purchase of the post office was approved — after 18 months of discussions. “This really is a dream come true. We were literally jumping up and down when we heard the news.”

Supplemented by extensive renovation research, HWF submitted a nominal offer to purchase the attractive landmark. Staying true to their missions, the two nonprofit organizations plan to restore the building to its 1923 appearance, using the original blueprints. The work is under way, and one of the new features will be handicapped accessibility, along with longer hours at the post office patron counter.



Now undergoing a \$500,000 restoration, the Old Main Post Office will continue to house postal operations as well as offices and other new businesses.

The project to renovate the Old Main Post Office is being financed by HWF through grants and Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) tax credits. The Foundation was recently awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The restoration is expected to cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000. The renovation process will be completed in four phases. Throughout the entire renovation, postal services will continue to be available to the retailers, businesses, and residents of the Washington community. The project is expected to take 18 months to two years. The key to the success of the renovation will be tenants willing to occupy the building and help produce the day-to-day revenue that supports the not-for-profit ownership.

In addition to moving their offices to this location, DWI received approval from the USPS for a contract postal unit to operate and staff the CPU. The building is owned by the Foundation, while DWI will run the postal operation which will hire staff, most likely one full-time person and a part-time staffer in the beginning.

The citizens of Washington will see new and existing businesses in the renovated

post office. With the Historic Washington Foundation and Downtown Washington, Inc., overseeing the operation, the Old Main Post Office will continue to be an attractive, well-maintained building.

This project “will bring new jobs, contribute to the local economy and support the city’s tax base,” says Hopp. “The additional revenue to the city will help produce good roads, police protection, and even more mundane things like park benches and plantings. That is what the population will see and feel and enjoy.”

Lauri Michel, Vice President of Community Revitalization at the National Trust, recently visited Washington and toured the post office project. She was struck by the “can do” spirit of dedicated individuals cultivating downtown living in the community. She credits the wealth of relationships among the Main Street organization, business owners, lenders, city hall, and residents with creating a vision for Washington that revolves around a strong, vital downtown district and making it happen – one postage stamp at a time.



NTHP Vice President Lauri Michel (3rd from right) joined Missouri Main Street (MMSC) Director Gayla Roten (left), MMSC Board President Steven Hoffman (2nd from right) and NTMSC Program Officer Norma Ramirez de Miess (far right) on a tour of Washington’s Post Office project and other downtown businesses.

Strong Partnerships Preserve Downtown

Washington’s Post Office initiative is about “impossible dreams becoming realities” through strong, enduring partnerships. Each successfully revitalized building and new business attracted to downtown acts as a catalyst for economic growth and has a positive effect on the quality of life for the entire community.

The Historic Washington Foundation (HWF) promotes functional and economically prudent adaptive reuse of blighted or underutilized real estate while preserving the history of the community. Public education about local history is a tool HWF uses heavily to promote downtown Washington as the center of local economic and cultural activity.

Downtown Washington, Inc., (DWI) is an accredited Main Street® program that has operated in the community for more than 21 years. It was among a handful of programs in Missouri

chosen to apply the Main Street Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization in 1989, and in 2006 it was selected by the Missouri Department of Economic Development to participate in the DREAM Initiative (Downtown Revitalization and Economic Assistance for Missouri).

Throughout that time, DWI has facilitated a number of restoration and preservation projects downtown, staying true to its mission: “To promote an attractive and financially stable downtown while preserving our historic resources and enriching the community.”

Together, DWI and HWF work closely with the city and the Washington Area Chamber of Commerce to recruit new businesses to the downtown area, preserve historic structures, and attract new patrons to enjoy the unique downtown experience.



MAIN STREET AT WORK

By Kathy La Plante, Senior Program Officer,
National Trust Main Street Center



HAUNTED HAPPENINGS

What’s happening on Main Streets now? What are the most interesting stories, the newest strategies, the lessons learned? In this column, National Trust Main Street Center staff share the latest trends and successes from the field.

It’s late in the afternoon and upstairs in the antique shop and museum, most visitors have left for the day. But on the first story of the Old Opera House in downtown Arcadia, Florida, the tenants hear children laughing and running up and down the hallways above. They’ve heard it before. And others have told even stranger tales.

The paranormal activity is so renowned locally that it has attracted the attention of paranormal investigators who visited the 1906 John J. Heard Opera House and

described the building as “extremely active,” recording both sounds and movement. Their conclusion was that the building has “multiple benevolent presences.” The

ghost hunters’ visits and documentation are currently being pitched to TV networks such as the Travel and Syfy channels. While some people might shy away from such a property, the building’s owner, Dick Chernoch, believes its reputation attracts visitors who hope to experience their own encounter with the paranormal.

Believer or not, the stories can captivate an audience as they did at a reception held during the Florida Main Street quarterly training workshop in June. Chernoch recounted the story of an elderly Arcadia resident, in her nineties, who lived in a nursing home. She asked her family to bring her to the Opera House so she could see it one last time. She was carried up the stairway and once there, she recounted her memories of the old theater space, where her family had come to watch vaudeville acts. Adults would gather to share the news of the day and



the children – well, the children ran up and down the hallways, playing tag, chasing each other, and laughing.

Chernoch, owner of the building for the past 15 years, has many tales to tell about visitors to the antique shops and the free museum. But his story starts with the previous owner who was alone in the building one day and heard children laughing in the hallway. She ran out to see who was there

but saw no one. She heard the laugh again, ignored it, and turned to walk back to her office. That’s when she felt something brush up against her leg. Shortly thereafter, she sold the property.

Although the spirits are “benevolent” and

non-threatening, their presence can be unnerving. Many people report that when walking down the stairs, they felt someone coming down behind them. People who have stood in front of the old stage get a strange feeling and report the hair on their arms standing up; others say they get goose bumps. In the former office of J.J. Heard, a woman became hysterical after seeing the face of a man in the window with his hand up, as if stopping her. When Chernoch showed the woman a picture of Heard, she said that was the man she saw in the window. She became short of breath and had to leave the building.

Chernoch had his own scare when he was checking for termites and heard noises – the sounds of a crowd of people. He walked around with his hammer in his hand and found nothing, so he began working again. The crowd noises started up again, and Chernoch decided to call it quits for the day.

Passersby on the street have reported seeing a girl in a frilly dress, peering out of the second-story corner window; she’s typically seen at the end of the day. Local folklore is that a small girl fell out of the second-story window but that the incident was covered up. There are no news accounts of such an accident ever happening. A woman shopping in the room where the girl has been seen left with a feeling of overwhelming sadness.



Looking for a close encounter of the supernatural kind? Visit the Old Opera House in Arcadia, Florida!



Fall weather brings out the spooktacular in Main Street communities all across the nation. Events range from graveyard tours in towns like Dover, N.H., (far left and left) to Halloween festivals in South Orange, N.J., (opposite page) and scores of other downtowns.

The antiques, museum, and history of the building are enough of an attraction for Dick Chernoch. Although many folks know about the building's reputation and come specifically to visit it, Chernoch is reluctant to promote the building as haunted. He takes comfort in hearing that there is no evil in his building; it's just a place spirits revisit because they enjoyed life here.

There are many such stories in communities throughout the country, especially in historic homes that surround our downtowns. One famous hotel, known for its paranormal activity, is the Ramada Plaza, previously named the Retlaw Hotel, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The spirit of the former owner, Walter (Retlaw is Walter spelled backwards) Schoreder likes to turn on faucets and lights, bang on the walls, and scream. While many people have reported seeing his apparition, this writer spends a week in the hotel every Christmas and has never witnessed any haunted happenings.

Graveyard tours, Halloween festivities in haunted houses and along haunted trails, haunted house tours, October festivals, and the like are promoted widely in the fall. Curiosity drives thousands to these events to experience the thrill of a good scare or to hear a spooky story they can pass along to others. Here's hoping that your spirits are "benevolent presences," too, but if you can't find your own, take heart, the space on the second floor of the Arcadia Opera House is for lease, complete with antiques and friendly residents.

Tapping Your Local Heritage

One of the eight guiding principles of the Main Street Approach is "Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets." Promoting and celebrating what is unique to your community and business district and capitalizing on these assets will give your promotional calendar a competitive edge and help attract heritage travelers.

Unique assets may include:

- **Architecture.** Recognize significant buildings, especially those located in historic districts or listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as well as buildings designed by famous architects. Celebrate the history of mills, tobacco warehouses, grand hotels, public institutions, colleges, etc.
- **History.** Fur trading, railroads, the Civil War, the Wild West, forts, famous historians with ties to the community, manufacturing, and historic events all provide a wealth of ideas for promotions. Even obscure historic events or recent history can make for fun promotions, such as the Manitowoc (Wis.) Sputnik Fest, which celebrates a 1962 event when a piece of Sputnik crashed into downtown.
- **Culture:** Celebrate the diversity of your community's population. Milwaukee, known as the City of Festivals (www.mkefestivals.com/hilton-milwaukee/), hosts dozens of events, including Arab Fest, Irish Fest, Polish Fest, Pride Fest, Bastille Days, Greek Fest, Indian Summer Fest, Mexican Fiesta, Fiesta Italiana, and German Fest.
- **Claims to Fame.** From Home of Pollyanna, Home of the Hamburger, Home of Elvis Presley to the birthplace of the blues, jazz, country, alternative, or hip hop, claims to fame can bring visitors flocking to your community. Many towns have achieved international recognition for their unique heritage, such as the Ice Cream, Fire Hydrant, Lost Luggage, Fruitcake, Cowboy, Cow Chip, and Jell-O Capitals of the World. And setting a Guinness Book of World Records in any category can help establish a history for your community.

Looking for your next promotional event? Take an inventory of your community's assets under each point listed above. Identify your strongest asset, then allow yourself ample time to stir up creative ideas that can honor and celebrate your place in history.



SHOPTALK

By Margie Johnson



SETTING THE STAGE FOR 4TH QUARTER SALES

Shop Talk is a continuing series of consumer-oriented retail articles by Margie Johnson, president of Shop Talk, a retail consulting firm that specializes in showing organizations how to become leaders in their marketplaces and industries through customer-centered training. Over the past 15 years, Margie has worked in many Main Street towns throughout the nation. She is passionate about helping small business owners become more successful.

Clearly, retailers are aware that the success of fourth quarter sales in 2010 will depend on the momentum that they create in their stores. “Waiting for business to happen” isn’t a strategy that will work in this economy. Retailers must “make business happen.”

Currently, I am coaching retailers to think of their stores as a “stage” and their associates as the “cast.” When they open those doors, it’s “show-time!” Consumer research reports that merchants will be servicing a very practical customer in the fourth quarter of this year. My own research from consumers indicates an appetite for stores that create a sense of connection and rapport. They seek a store that expresses a sincere appreciation for their business and one that breaks the S-O-S cycle (Sea Of Sameness).

During the fourth quarter of 2010 – “the golden quarter” – I am challenging specialty retailers to create a strategic marketing plan that integrates a rhythm of events, contests, coupons, cause-related ties, and “no hassle” service. Get your Main Street retailers to make the shopping experience fun, memorable, and easy. Customers continue to say that shopping is so often stressful, a chore,

and time consuming. Retailers need to understand this perception, seek to reframe this thinking, and make their stores *enticing, engaging, educational, and entertaining!*

The following “punch list” contains ways that store owners can create low-budget, yet high-impact, marketing opportunities. Give this list to your retailers and suggest that they

select a few ideas that would be appropriate for their stores and that their clients would love to “buy into.”

- First off, remember that today’s greatest marketing opportunities are created by educated, enthusiastic sales associates who are eager to provide “solutions” for customers. Power up the sales team with a recommitment to serve excellence. Urge them to think of their roles as “solution providers and public relations agents.” Turn your clients into advocates who can help sell your business. This is the key success strategy!
- Refresh the store’s look for the holiday season. Create an overall theme, color palette, etc., to set a magical mood. Check out this website for fresh ideas – www.cosmoworlds.com/trends/christmasworld-trends_2009_2010. Also, if there is a design or interior decorating school nearby, it could be a great source of talent – the students can bring a fresh perspective.
- Use the Walt Disney approach in developing a seasonal strategy: “start with the end in sight.” What do you want customers to be saying, feeling, experiencing? What will they say when they leave the store? “Hassle-free shopping” could include pre-wrapped items, wish lists, delivery, extended store hours, phone consultations, appointments, etc. Be creative.
- Make creative gift wrapping a marketing opportunity. Ask your paper supplier for examples of new, yet cost-effective, ways to add zing to your gift wrapping. Create a signature look that defines the business.
- Reach out to the corporate world and/or small business owners to sell gift certificates in bulk for a substantial discount, i.e., pre-sell \$50, \$75, or \$100 cards for 25 percent off. Make this a UVP (Unique Value Proposition). The \$50 gift card only costs the customer \$37.50, and it is personalized and gift wrapped in packaging that has a distinctive “WOW” factor. It’s a win-win – no hassle, cost and time saving for the business owner, and a way to bring new clients into your store. Also, these gift cards are frequently redeemed for more than the full value; thus the effective markdown is less.
- Approach the fourth quarter as the “hospitality” quarter. Think of ways you can welcome customers and clients, such as providing refreshments, putting out chairs where shoppers or their companions can relax, and creating a play area for kids with games, DVDs, etc. Underline the “welcome and wanted” mentality that customers so rarely experience in stores today.
- Experiment with special promotions that can create a “buzz” in your town.
 - ◆ “Sleepless in _____(your town).” Have a pajama party, serve espresso, hire a limo to pick up customers and take them home with their gift packages all wrapped and ready. Consider giving away some teddy bears, soft throws, or small pillows. Let your creative side go wild with this concept. Have fun!
 - ◆ Select a cause, charity, or club and team up with them for an in-store event. Give a percentage of the sales to the charity, and use members of the group to “pre-sell” the event. Let them be assistants “on the floor.” These types of events can raise awareness of both the charity and your business. Create pre-press releases, with photos – they are a key to success.

Among ways you can welcome customers is by creating an area where kids can play while their parents shop.





To get customers buzzing about your downtown businesses, encourage store owners to create special promotions such as a "Girls Night Out" (far left). Creating a sensory experience by offering refreshments customers can taste and smell, music they can hear, and products they can touch is another way to entice shoppers into stores.

◆ Pampered Patron Party or GNO (Girls Night Out). Invite your top clients for a night of shopping that includes some pampering. Hire a massage therapist for neck/shoulder massages, reflexologist to offer foot and leg pressure point release, hair stylist, make-up artist, or color analyst. Make it a night to remember. Often these practitioners will offer their services for free as a way to promote their businesses.

◆ On-line ways to excite customers include the following:

- ◆ Create a custom men's necktie or ladies' scarf with a logo or picture, at www.beta.gifts.com.
- ◆ Customize greeting cards at www.mycardmaker.com.
- ◆ Personalize postage stamps with a logo or picture at www.photo.stamps.com.
- ◆ Commission a humorous cartoon through www.andertoons.com.

• Examples of national days or months that can be used to create in-store events or promotions:

October 15	National Grouch Day
October 23	Mother-in-Law Day
November 20	Make-A-Wish Day
November 21	World Hello Day
December 12	Poinsettia Day
December 31	Make-Up-Your-Mind Day
January	Customer Appreciation Month

* For an expanded version of this calendar of events, please e-mail shoptalk@shoptalk.org.

Ideas for Store Interiors

• Let creative signage be your silent salesperson. Find ways to communicate product stories, unique uses, origin of product, something whimsical, etc. Ask someone who does calligraphy to create small signs

that can be displayed in frames or on small easels. It's fun to watch the customer's reaction and it's a great way to start a dialogue.

- Give all sales associates business cards and have them write on the back, "I'll be pleased to assist you in the future. Thanks. Signed _____." This is a great way to connect with a customer who says "I'll be back."
- During this holiday season or any season, make sure your restroom facilities are client-ready. Don't let a customer leave your store because you don't have a public restroom. Regardless of the age, condition, etc., if it works, let them use it. Hold a contest to come up with creative ways to enhance these facilities. Staff will love it and customers will be grateful.
- Create price-point groupings for items under \$10 and products ranging from \$10-25. Make the display attractive and pre-wrap several of each item. "Grab and go" will be extremely popular this holiday season.
- Create sensory experiences: *smell* cookies baking, apple cider warming, vanilla candles burning; *see* a vast assortment of products that are well displayed; *hear* the local string quartet or harpist; encourage customers to *touch and handle* products; and *try on* items. *Taste* the goodies that are out on the counters. Appeal to all the senses. Vendors will often supply products for sampling free of charge.
- Offer a "Grand Giveaway" valued at \$500. Seek support for this promotion from your top vendors and get a complementary business to sell you their product at a discount and vice versa. Put this together in a gorgeous presentation. Invite custom-

ers to start registering on December 1st. They can register each time they make a purchase. Vendors are quite willing to support this type of marketing – just give their brand credit. Be sure and e-mail customers about the Grand Giveaway to entice them to your store.

- Reach out to your Facebook fans with special "daily deals." This easy-to-implement marketing can pay big dividends with very little cost. If you don't have a business Facebook page, ask a marketing student from a nearby college to assist you. Creating raving fans that power word-of-mouth advertising is easy with social media.

Unleash your creativity, involve your staff, and look for ways to enhance the experiences customers can have in your store this fourth quarter. Today's consumers have reset the expectation bar, with the convergence of new technologies (apps for everything), their lust for instant gratification, and their thirst for new experiences. With these higher expectations, retailers are being squeezed to think in "real time" about ways they can adapt their business model to attract and retain this new consumer. In short, my advice is to be very, very proactive and create a marketing calendar to entice customers and entertain them.

"Set the Stage! Lights, Camera, Action!"

Great retailing to you!
Margie Johnson

Margie Johnson is an Allied Member of the National Main Street network. Learn more about Margie and Shop Talk at http://al-liedirectory.mainstreet.org/listing/margie_johnson.html. She can also be reached at 757-491-1411, by e-mail at shoptalk@shoptalk.org, or by visiting her website, <http://www.shoptalk.org>.



NETWORK NOTES

“Network Notes” is compiled and written monthly by **Andrea L. Dono**. If you have interesting projects or ideas you would like to share, e-mail andrea_dono@nthp.org.

HOPE Rewarded: Affordable Housing Funding for Main Street

Every year since 2006, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has generously made HOPE VI Main Street grant funds available for new affordable housing projects in Main Street districts in communities with populations of 50,000 or less. And every year, a handful of municipal officials tackle the lengthy, complex application form — the intricacies of which are only compounded by its relatively short turnaround time. Why the effort? Awards can total up to a million dollars. These funds are at work across the country, fueling historic rehab projects that are adding a housing dimension to commercial districts, creating jobs, and catalyzing new developments, while providing hard-working families a safe, comfortable place to live. It's easy to lose sight of that when staring down a monstrous application form.

Awards were recently announced for FY 2010, making this the perfect opportunity to introduce a few recent grant recipients who are either nearing project completion or about ready for ground-breaking. Meet some of the winners:

Henderson, North Carolina

In Henderson, a town of 16,000, the \$1 million HOPE VI Main Street award spurred a new era in the community's downtown revitalization efforts: upper-floor housing, combined with mostly ground-floor retail. The FY08 grant supported the Henderson Lofts project, which created 12 units of affordable housing in four of the historic downtown's buildings. The nearly \$1.5 million project also included 4,100 square feet of remodeled commercial space in two of the properties, which had been vacant for more than 30 years. The upper floors where most of the apartments were built were in no better shape, having stood vacant for at least a decade longer. Henderson Lofts is the first-mixed use project of its kind in Henderson, and one that Erris Dunston, Director of Planning and Development for the

community, calls a major step forward in helping the city achieve its goals of revitalizing downtown and expanding the housing stock. With the apartments located in four locations on S. Garnett Street — the town's main commercial artery — the intention is to stimulate the entire corridor by encouraging adjacent property owners to join the redevelopment process. This ground-breaking project began in November 2009 and is nearing its grand opening.

Marshalltown, Iowa

Good news keeps coming for Marshalltown, Iowa, (pop. 26,000) these days, with the announcement of its FY10 \$1 million award only the most recent sign of its downtown development success. Redevelopment of the Iowa Wholesale Building will create 28 affordable rental units in the vacant former grocery warehouse. Michelle Spohnheimer, Community Development and Development Director, is very excited: “We've been waiting on this announcement since April,” she said. “It will show a positive change and be a nice complement to our downtown plans.”

The historic commercial building at 201 E. Main Street, which had been vacant for years, was identified in 2004 as the key to Marshalltown's overall downtown development plan. Spohnheimer and her colleagues actively promoted the property to prospective develop-

ers, but it wasn't until Cohen-Esrey Real Estate Services called, looking for a historic rehab for senior housing, that the pieces fell into place.

The Iowa Wholesale Building is a contributing structure to the National Register historic district, and its rehabilitation fits in nicely with several other redevelopment projects in the area. The 1949 Orpheum Theatre, for example, just opened across the street in June, with a 152-seat movie theater, state-of-the-art black box theater, learning studios, exhibit hall, amphitheater, and coffee shop. The City of Marshalltown's offices recently relocated to the five-story Carnegie Library. Constructed in 1902, the building was vacated when the new, LEED-silver public library opened in January 2009 — the first of its kind in the state.

Essential to the application's success in Spohnheimer's eyes was having an affordable housing project waiting in the wings, ready to go forward when the NOFA was released. Spohnheimer also stressed the importance of partnering with an experienced developer and involving them heavily in the application process. Now the team is awaiting word on its Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) allocation before beginning construction — but odds are they'll continue Marshalltown's win-streak.

Biddeford, Maine

For the \$14 million Mill at Saco River project, notification that Biddeford had received a \$1 million HOPE VI Main Street grant couldn't have come at a better time. The FY08 award to this city of 21,000 provided essential funding right when the bottom dropped out of the real estate market. With \$1 million secured, the

developer could leverage it to obtain additional funding for the rehab of an 88,000 square-foot former textile mill. The grant was especially useful in strengthening the project's application for Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Amy Cullen of The Szanton Company and a four-year veteran of the federal government provided six weeks of assistance on the city's application — a huge boost for Biddeford and its small staff. She strongly recommended that the city government enlist



© City of Marshalltown, Iowa

The HOPE VI Main Street project in Marshalltown, Iowa, will anchor the east end of Main Street, opposite the newly restored historic theater.

the support of a private developer with the staff resources to devote to the application process.

Now the Mill at Saco River project is nearing its November 2010 completion date and 20 deposits have already been received for its 66 mixed-income apartments (40 of them affordable). This project complements a revitalization movement that is sweeping through Biddeford and its neighbor across the river, Saco, both of which benefit from a new Amtrak station, the city's riverwalk proposal, and the planned redevelopment of an additional million square feet of vacant mills, what developer Doug Sanford calls "America's best bones — pyramids that were built in the Industrial Revolution."

Burrillville, Rhode Island

Burrillville, Rhode Island, a town of 16,000, also has firsthand experience with these Industrial Age pyramids. In 2006, the town received a boost in redeveloping its vacant mills in the form of a \$500,000 HOPE VI Main Street grant. These funds were applied to the \$15 million Stillwater Redevelopment Project, which converted a historic, three-story, former wool-weaving mill into 47 apartments, 37 of them reserved for low or very-low income families, and two office suites. Thomas Kravitz, Director of Economic Development, credits the HOPE VI Main Street funding with paying for all of the project's soft costs, including engineers, architects, and lawyers



The Stillwater Mill redevelopment complements Burrillville's recent downtown investment, including a new library and riverwalk.

fees — professional services that produced the documents and drawings so useful in generating community support for the undertaking. The Stillwater project, due to open in December 2010, is joined by a new 25,000 square-foot library that opened in 2008, and a riverwalk that runs through Main Street. The owner of an eatery adjacent to the Stillwater project was inspired to rehab and rename it the Waterfall Café, in anticipation of the loft development.

Besides the inherent sustainability of the historic rehab, the project wins major points for utilizing six geothermal wells that will provide low-cost energy to the mill development.

NOTE: Regarding future HOPE VI Main Street funds, it is uncertain whether Congress will approve an FY 2011 appropriation for this program. If there is HOPE VI funding, a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) will be released approximately six to eight months after the appropriation is passed. To stay informed, please check the National Trust Main Street Center's HOPE VI page, and register with www.grants.gov to receive e-mail updates.

Around the Network

This summer, Iowa Governor Chet Culver announced I-JOBS grant awards totaling \$13 million for 24 projects to support physical improvements in the historic commercial districts of Main Street Iowa communities.

During its 2010 session, the Iowa legislature appropriated the I-JOBS funding for use in Main Street Iowa designated districts for projects that are currently on the Iowa Department of Economic Development's (IDED) highest priority list, including those that have previously applied for funding or received partial funding for façade master plans to rehabilitate storefronts; that have streetscape projects with the planning and the majority of funding secured; or that have projects that will enhance their downtown district and are considered "shovel ready." These grants were created to support the enhancement of "vital historic areas in our Iowa communities," said Governor Culver.

Thom Guzman, director of the Iowa Downtown Resource Center, noted it was a challenge to "go from seeking updates on these potential projects to interviewing project developers to making funding recommendations to getting department approvals to finally getting to the Governor's announcement. We actually did all of this in 72 calendar days! My team did a herculean effort to make this happen."

One project includes \$1.5 million for façade improvements to 35 properties in downtown Belle Plaine; this project is part of a comprehensive downtown improvement plan that includes a sustainable streetscape, as well as façade stabilization and improvement. Oskaloosa received \$800,000 toward the \$6 million rehabilitation of a quarter block of downtown (Trolley Place). The project is using multiple funding sources, including a \$1 million Hope VI Grant that was

received in 2007 as well as state tax credits. The rehab will create mixed-use spaces that will have residential units on the upper floors and a geothermal system.

Check in with these and other Iowa success stories at our 2011 National Main Streets Conference in Des Moines, May 22-25. Visit www.MainStreet.org for more info.

The Maine Downtown Center took its nine local managers on a tour of the state's Main Street communities during its new Rolling Retreat. Hitting all communities, except for one that was a bit too far off the trip's itinerary, the group



Maine's Main Street managers got to know each other and all of their communities much better during the state's Rolling Retreat road trip.

took driving and walking tours of each other's Main Streets. They shared ideas, inspiration, successes, and challenges while bonding with each other more closely. The Maine Downtown Center footed the cost of the van rental, hotel stays, and meals for the multi-day road trip.

Web Watch

Looking for nontraditional financial support? Community investing is investor capital that is directed to communities underserved by traditional financial services. It provides access to credit, equity, capital, and basic banking products that some communities may not otherwise have. To help towns find everything from community development loan funds to venture capital funds, the Community Investing Center offers a Community Investment Database search engine that lets you plug in the type of social impact your project intends to make (housing, micro-enterprise, small business, community facilities, etc.) so you can seek a funding agency other than your local bank. The website also has an **impact calculator** to determine the social return on the impact community investing has in terms of jobs created, homes built, businesses started, and lives changed. For more information go to: <http://www.communityinvestingcenterdb.org/>.

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Parting Shot



Brockport Street Sign

by Duncan Hay, Cultural Resources Manager,
Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

The Village of Brockport is one of the shining pearls among the 234 communities located in the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. Brockport has a vibrant business district and, like many canal villages, a strong connection between main street and the canal. Governor DeWitt Clinton, who led the effort to build the Erie Canal across New York, is memorialized in street and building names across the state. Today, downtown areas throughout the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor are home to theaters, museums, local shops, and restaurants in the historic canal-era buildings and play host to festivals, farmer's markets, and special events.

If you have a photo that captures the essence of your Main Street, e-mail it to mainstreet@nthp.org and we'll consider it for next issue's Parting Shot. Please make sure the image file is at least 5"x6" at 300 dpi. Let your imagination run wild. We're looking for unusual, artistic shots that capture the spirit of your Main Street District.