

MAINSTREETNOW

The Journal of the National Main Street Center | SPRING 2014



Milledgeville, Georgia
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Harrisonburg, Virginia
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GREAT ★ 2014 AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

BY LINDA S. GLISSON

HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

WOODBINE, IOWA



Woodbine, Iowa
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MAINSTREETNOW

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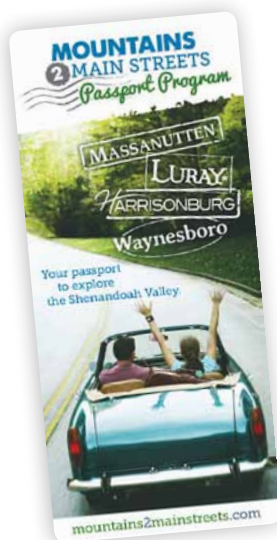


**National Main Street
Center**
a subsidiary of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Main Street Center inspires and enables the building of economically vibrant and enduring communities and commercial districts through investment in their historic and distinctive places.

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At this year's Main Streets Conference, the National Main Street Center honored three communities with the Great American Main Street Award. Harrisonburg, Virginia, Milledgeville, Georgia, and Woodbine, Iowa, were chosen for their dramatic, innovative efforts to rebuild the pride, the spirit, and the economic vitality of their commercial districts. Read their inspiring stories.



[Road Trip | 58](#)

Take a trip along with the crew of the documentary film series, *Slow Road*, as they visit each of the GAMSAs-winning communities. In this Road Trip diary, they give you a behind-the-scenes look at the people and places that make these communities special.



[The Ones to Watch | 65](#)

For the first time this year, the National Main Street Center introduced a new awards category—the “Ones to Watch.” Two communities were selected because of their work on creative projects that have poised them on the edge of a major transformation. Read about this year's winners—Middlesboro, Kentucky, and Rawlins, Wyoming—and see why they offer inspiration for both newly formed and long-established Main Street programs.



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Retail consultant Margie Johnson takes a look at the latest shifts in retailing and asks “Where do we go from here?” She takes a look at the factors driving these shifts and offers suggestions on ways small businesses can take advantage of these changes to reposition themselves for success.





By Patrice Frey
President and CEO
National Main Street Center, Inc.

Welcome to the Spring 2014 edition of *Main Street Now*! I hope those of you who traveled to the 2014 National Main Streets Conference in Detroit came away feeling as energized as I did. There's a lot of innovation going on in the Motor City, and opportunities to learn about creative revitalization tactics were abundant—whether through formal education sessions, mobile workshops, or just out and about after the day was done.

Just as importantly, the conference offered inspiration in the form of fellow Main Street members, who came together from every corner of the country to learn from one another. An amazing crowd of 1,400 people attended this year's conference—the highest number of conference attendees in the past five years! I thought it was particularly moving to see all the camaraderie on display during this year's opening session—with Main Streets cheering one another on, especially this year's Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA) winners.

In our spring edition of *Main Street Now*, we dig in to the back stories of this year's three GAMSA winners. These are towns

that have lovingly preserved and re-purposed the vintage and historic buildings in their midst, designed creative programs to boost local business retention and recruitment, and come together as a community to make their downtowns vibrant, inviting spaces. While each community is distinct and has transformed itself in a unique way, a deeper look at Harrisonburg (Virginia), Milledgeville (Georgia), and Woodbine, (Iowa) reveals one important commonality among all three: a committed Main Street staff, board members, and volunteers who are devoted to making their community a better place to live, work, play, and visit—all based on the principles of the Main Street Four-Point Approach®.

In Harrisonburg, for example, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance worked to add the city to the National Register of Historic Places. That designation allowed local developers to use state and federal tax credits to transform historic buildings into modern, mixed-use developments. For example, a 1911 commercial building was converted into a beautiful luxury apartment complex with 32 apartments and a popular farm-to-table restaurant. Since Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance was formed 10

years ago, it has recorded an impressive track record of success through its efforts to bring residents downtown: 1,200 new jobs have been created and tax revenues have increased \$2 million.

Milledgeville Main Street, meanwhile, has developed equally creative and successful tactics to revitalize its downtown. The BOOST program has local donors giving small sums of money to help local businesses. Businesses then apply for grants of \$100 to \$1,000, which can be used for marketing, advertising, renovations, and equipment purchases. When a business wins, Milledgeville Main Street shows up with a giant check and balloons, generating excitement for the program throughout the community.

In Iowa, Woodbine Main Street has made great strides thanks to its ability to leverage federal funds—and its smart approach to downtown development. In 2012, Woodbine Main Street finished rehabbing 23 downtown building facades, using \$500,000 from the Community Development Block Grant Program. Woodbine Main Street's next big goal is to recover from a serious fire that damaged four historic downtown buildings. The program isn't planning a simple restoration, however: it's using an in-depth market analysis and applying Main Street preservation lessons to turn a tragic loss into more dynamic offerings downtown. The reconstruction will include more housing, improved storefronts, and better signage.

For the first time, the National Main Street Center also recognized two “Ones to Watch”—Main Street groups that are making huge strides in using the Four Point Approach® to revitalize

their downtowns. Kentucky's Discover Downtown Middlesboro has big plans to create 1,000 jobs in the next five years and, perhaps even more impressive, has more than \$1.2 million in grants pending for 2014. Meanwhile in Wyoming, Rawlins Downtown Development Authority (DDA)/ Main Street has completed an incredible 55 rehab projects and added 25 new businesses in the past eight years. We're expecting great things from these budding “works in progress!”

In addition to introducing the “Ones to Watch” category for the first time this year, we also debuted videos on each of the winners, created by the filmmakers at *Slow Road*. The documentary film series is dedicated to exploring Main Streets around the country, and their films helped introduce us to the passionate people who make these communities so inspiring. The crew was moved by the experience of seeing the three Main Street communities in person—so we asked them to share their road diary with us. You can follow their trip around the country through the pages of *Main Street Now*.

I hope this issue leaves you energized and inspired, and that you come away equipped with new tools and ideas for your own Main Street district. Congratulations again to this year's award-winning communities!

Warm regards,



Patrice Frey
President & CEO
National Main Street Center, Inc.



GREAT 2014 AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

BY LINDA S. GLISSON

HARRISONBURG, VA ★ MILLEDGEVILLE, GA ★ WOODBINE, IA

Saluting the achievements and importance of downtown revitalization through its 2014 Great American Main Street Awards (GAMSA), the National Main Street Center honored three communities on May 18th at the Opening Session of the National Main Streets Conference for their dramatic and innovative efforts to rebuild the pride, the spirit, and the economic vitality of their commercial districts.

Each year, the National Main Street Center recognizes the best and the brightest—Main Street communities whose impassioned commitment, creative strategies, and inspiring successes serve as national models for comprehensive, preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

“Each of this year’s winners has proven that incremental progress, strong public-private partnerships, and persistence are essential to create economic vitality and a unique sense of place,” said Patrice Frey, President and CEO of the National Main Street Center. “They have shown impressive resilience and resolve in their work to preserve their rich history, boost local businesses, and create vibrant, exciting Main Streets where people want to work, live, and play.”

Selected by a national jury composed of former award winners, community development professionals, and representatives of government agencies involved in economic development and historic preservation based on these selection criteria, this year’s award winners offer outstanding examples of the power of the Main Street Four-Point Approach®, which has attracted \$59.6 billion in public

and private investments, added 502,728 new jobs, and generated 246,158 building rehabs over the past three decades. The National Main Street Center is honored to recognize the 2014 Great American Main Streets: Virginia’s Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, Georgia’s Milledgeville Main Street, and Iowa’s Woodbine Main Street. Here are their stories:

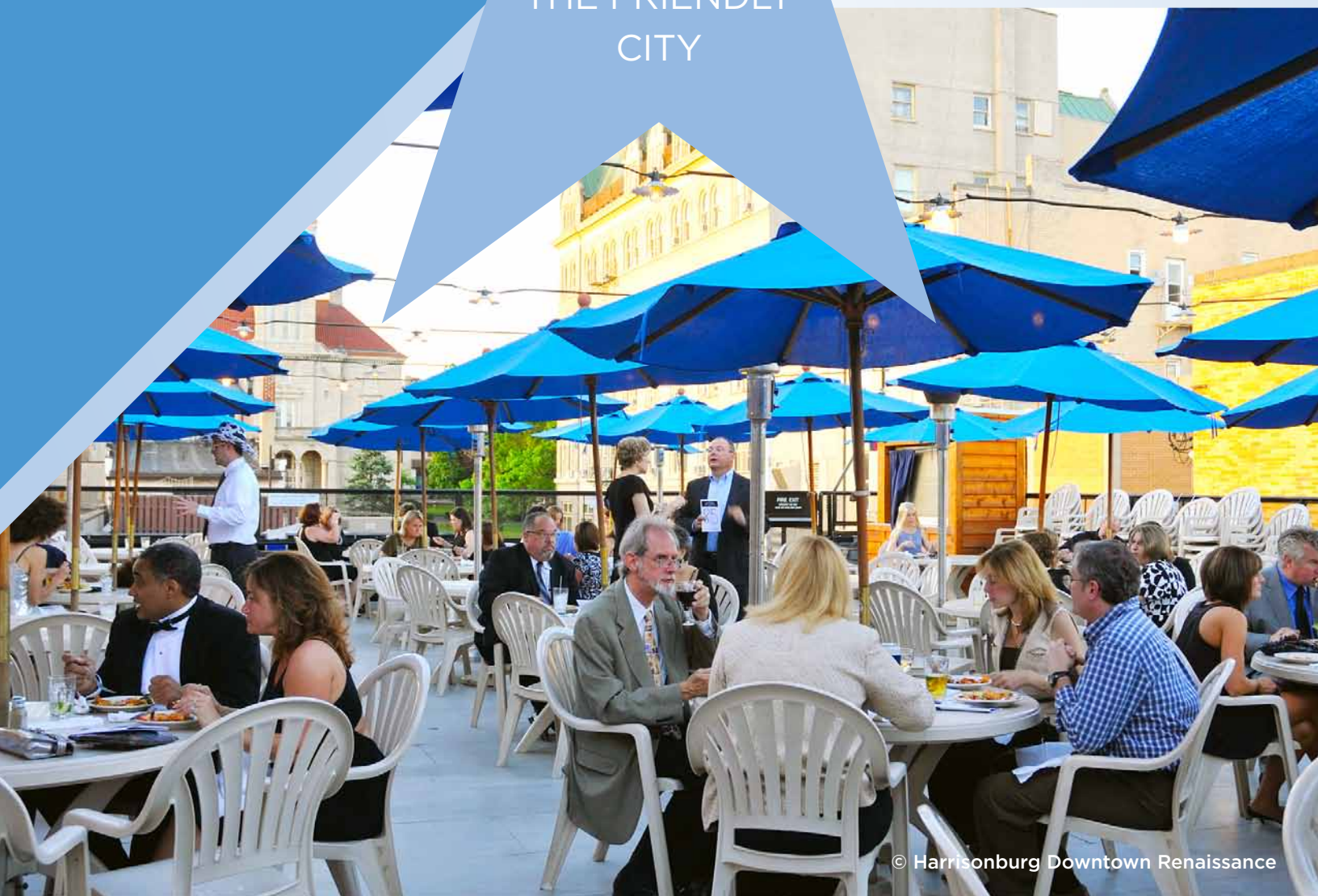
THE ONES TO WATCH

For the first time this year, the National Main Street Center introduced a new awards category—“Ones to Watch.” Two communities were selected because of their work on creative projects that have put them on the cusp of a major transformation. Read about this year’s winners and see why they offer inspiration for both newly formed and long-established Main Street programs on page 65.



HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

THE FRIENDLY
CITY





© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance



A decade ago, downtown Harrisonburg had lost its luster, becoming a dim, tarnished version of its once-vibrant self. Thanks to the commitment

of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance and its many partners, the town's commercial core is once again bustling and vibrant, with a strong and growing arts scene (above), a lively culinary district (opposite page), and innovative financial incentives to attract new tech and other startup companies.

Nestled in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley two hours from Richmond and Washington, D.C., Harrisonburg began life in 1779 as the county seat of Rockingham County. Over the next century, Harrisonburg grew into an agricultural powerhouse, becoming a national leader in the poultry trade and the largest producer of wheat and hay in the state. The community's success in these industries led to construction of a wide range of specialized building types, including warehouses, factories, and service stations.

In the 1960s, however, Harrisonburg succumbed to the national trend of declining downtowns, demolishing vacant and older structures and considering the possibility of creating a pedestrian mall. The downtown lost its luster, becoming a tarnished, dim reflection of its once-vibrant self.

But over the past decade, that has all changed. Today, Harrisonburg boasts a lively culinary district, innovative technology zones, and lots of downtown housing to convince young professionals and graduates of the local universities to call the community home.

Who is responsible for this resurgence? Most would say Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR), the city's local Main Street program.

PROGRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

"If I were to describe downtown 10 or 11 years ago," says Eddie Bumbaugh, Executive Director of HDR, "a couple of things come to mind. One would be somewhat 'ignored.' And you certainly wouldn't use the word 'vibrancy.'"



© Harrisonburg
Downtown
Renaissance

© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

HDR has developed strong partnerships throughout the community. It has worked with the city on “The Next Step Downtown” (above) to create a new streetscape and built a strong town-gown connection with James Madison University (below) that brings students downtown to live, shop, and play.



© JMU Marketing Photography

Downtown was here but it didn’t have a lot of life.” Buildings were vacant, façades needed work, and many people thought the area was unsafe.

While several revitalization initiatives were started over the past 30 years, none proved successful due to lack of funding and volunteer support. Then in 2003, Harrisonburg’s leaders discovered a model

that worked for them—the Four-Point Main Street Approach®—and began to build partnerships for a successful revitalization effort. The City Council voted unanimously to provide \$80,000 with additional funding from private sources, as well as office space for the newly formed Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. In 2004, HDR was designated as an official Virginia Main Street community and has been accredited as a National Main Street Program every year since.

“The key point to being a Main Street community,” explains Bumbaugh, “is the model [that] allows the community to have its own priorities and flexibility, [while still having] guidance and resources in terms of what has worked elsewhere.”

Harrisonburg Vice-Mayor Charles Chenault concurs and points to the powerful partnerships the community has built: “One thing that is really

important... is that different things work for different communities, and we found our success story—what works for us—and that’s the public-private partnership. We’ve also found that we can’t do without the participation of a group like HDR.”

HDR has worked with groups throughout the community and the region to improve and promote downtown. Among other initiatives, HDR has worked with the city on “The Next Step Downtown” campaign to provide amenities for a new streetscape; collaborated with James Madison University (JMU) to bring students downtown, promote cycling as an alternative mode of transportation, and build a strong town-gown connection. Most recently it partnered with Main

Street and tourism programs in Waynesboro and Luray to create the Mountains2Main Street Passport, a program designed to promote the downtowns of all three Main Street communities to tourists who visit Shenandoah National Park.

Accolades from community partners show the strength and credibility of Harrisonburg’s Main Street program. “I’ve been in Harrisonburg since 2001,” says Suzi Carter, Program Director of Northend Greenway, a project to create a 2.5-mile pathway and park in north Harrisonburg. “HDR is making downtown the cultural hub not only for the city but also for the county. And I think that’s going to grow. I think I believe that so much that I don’t think I would be here if it weren’t for HDR’s involvement in downtown revitalization.”

Regionally, HDR has collaborated with the Main Street and tourism programs in Waynesboro and Luray to create the Mountains2MainStreet Passport, which promotes the downtowns of all three Main Street communities to tourists who visit Shenandoah National Park.

Waynesboro

Distance to Massanutten Resort

Harrisonburg 14 miles
Waynesboro 30 miles
Luray 29 miles

MOUNTAINS 2 MAIN STREETS Passport Program

MASSANUTTEN
LURAY
HARRISONBURG
Waynesboro

Your passport to explore the Shenandoah Valley.

MOUNTAINS 2 MAIN STREETS Passport

mountains2mainstreets.com

Passports Stamped Here

Look for this decal on participating businesses.

mountains2mainstreets.com



While HDR has worked with all types of organizations on all types of projects, its most significant accomplishments have been its partnerships with the city to create opportunities for economic growth and downtown housing.

DOWNTOWN IS COOKIN'

On January 28, 2014, with leadership from HDR, the Harrisonburg City Council passed a resolution creating the state's first Downtown Culinary District. Several factors led to this designation. Throughout most of its history, Harrisonburg has been an agricultural center; many food-related businesses, such as City Exchange,

Wetsel Seed, Cassco Ice, Rocco Feeds, and Shenandoah's Pride, started in Harrisonburg and made a national impact on the food industry. Moreover, with a wealth of farms and agricultural businesses in the community and surrounding county, Harrisonburg became an early leader in the farm-to-table movement.

Today, Harrisonburg draws "foodies" from all over the region and beyond. The downtown boasts more than 30 unique, locally owned restaurants and eateries that offer dining ranging from mainstream to ethnic, casual to upscale, and locally sourced to international ingredients. Complementing these popular eateries are





© Stephen Little

Created in January 2014, Harrisonburg's Downtown Culinary District has begun to draw "foodies" from all over the region. The downtown boasts more than 30 popular eateries, including the Clementine Café (opposite page), the Harrisonburg Farmers Market (above), and many specialty wine and beer shops.

other food-related businesses, including a year-round farmers market, a food co-op, specialty wine and beer shops, food tours, cooking classes, and bed-and-breakfasts for visitors who want to stay a while.

HDR has created an inviting atmosphere for both diners and restaurateurs. Bethel Arefaine of Blue Nile Ethiopian Cuisine praises the community for its openness to new experiences. "The community has welcomed the type of food we serve," says Arefaine, "and has welcomed our family as well. Harrisonburg has taken on ... the

restoration of the buildings and the revitalization of the downtown. The people who have worked toward it have been fantastic."

Equally important to Harrisonburg's food community are the farmers market and food co-op, both of which offer locally sourced foods and nutritional guidance.

"People have a direct connect with the food they are bringing home to prepare, to eat, to enjoy," says Josie Showalter of the Harrisonburg Farmers Market. "They can talk to vendors about how that lettuce was grown or practices they used. The farmers



market is absolutely one of the best places to learn about the community.”

Erin Shehane of the Friendly City Food Co-op echoes this view: “We are excited to have a vibrant local community and really want to become a place where the community can enjoy food and learn about food, health, and nutrition. We work with local dairies, and we have local items in every single aisle of our store.”

The culinary district has helped the town celebrate its vibrant food culture in other ways as well. “With the local food movement, the farmers market, and our Friendly City Food Co-op, we’ve had a huge emergence of food-related events,”

says Nicole Martana, HDR’s Promotions Manager. “Through these events, we’ve been able to balance the year with offerings of music and food—collaborating with our downtown businesses, our local breweries, and our local vineyards.

Harrisonburg’s culinary events, which include the twice yearly Taste of Downtown Week, the Rocktown Beer and Music Festival, Valley Fourth’s Grillin’ at the Pavilion Cook-Off, National Food Day Farm-to-Table Breakfast, Vegan Night Out, and the Chocolate Walk give local restaurateurs, business owners, and food lovers a chance to create and share unique dining experiences.

The Downtown Culinary District has helped Harrisonburg celebrate its food heritage through a number of food-related events. Valley Fourth, for example, the town’s Fourth of July celebration, which draws more than 10,000 visitors, features the Grillin’ at the Pavilion Cook-Off, a popular barbecue competition.





Culinary events that celebrate the growing vibrancy and diversity of Harrisonburg's food heritage include the Rocktown Beer and Music Festival, launched in 2010. The event, which is the brainchild of a downtown restaurant owner and 30 microbreweries across the country, sells out to a crowd of 3,000 each year. The festival has become a symbol of a larger craft beer culture in Harrisonburg.

HDR was not only instrumental in helping create the Downtown Culinary District; it has also built significant partnerships with downtown restaurants through formation of the Downtown Dining Alliance. “This partnership,” says Bumbaugh, “encourages collaboration among the growing number of locally owned downtown restaurants to promote downtown as a regional dining destination. The impact of the dining alliance is significant. Downtown restaurants annually donate almost \$100,000 through in-kind and cash contributions to charitable causes.”

Harrisonburg is well on its way to culinary fame. In the last year alone, the downtown’s food scene was hailed by such publications as the *The Washingtonian*, *USAToday*, *Southern Living*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Virginia Living*, and many other local, regional, and national publications.

While Harrisonburg’s celebration of its culinary heritage is bringing national recognition to the downtown, its focus on technology zones and other economic incentives is providing a much-needed boost for business recruitment.



DOWNTOWN BECOMES TECH TOWN

Over the past decade, a strong partnership between the city and HDR's Economic Development Committee has led to creation of numerous districts and programs to retain and attract businesses. None has been more important than the Downtown Technology Zone, which provides tax incentives for qualifying businesses that locate downtown.

"This is an exciting time here in Harrisonburg ... It's been very neat to watch downtown turn into a technology zone," says Brian Shull, the city's Economic Development Director. "It's a unique story that we have so many tech firms clustered downtown. That creates synergy, and we're starting to build a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that will encourage others to start new businesses."

"There's an active and growing tech startup culture here in Harrisonburg," says Andy Perrine, President of HDR's Board of Directors. "It was largely inspired by Rosetta Stone [which employs 500 people] coming into town, but having [James Madison University, with its 20,000 students] also creates that atmosphere and now that there are more than 30 independently owned restaurants downtown, lots of music, you know, craft beer, it's a funky scene that people like to be part of."

Along with the technology zone, HDR and the city have worked together to create a downtown historic district, a façade enhancement grant program, and an economic revitalization zone, as well as a BizLoan microloan program, Business Resource Guide, Business Recruitment Guide, and web listings of available downtown properties.

The results have been dramatic. Since 2004, 1,200 new jobs have been created, bringing the number of full- and part-time employees in the district to more than 4,500. Private investment in the downtown has exceeded \$54 million, while public investment has topped \$13 million. Other trends that bode well for the future include the downtown's low vacancy rate of 3.5 percent, a rise in real estate value to more than half a billion dollars, and a

nearly \$2 million increase in tax revenue.

HDR's role in this economic resurgence has not gone unnoticed. For four years in a row, the program has been named "Best Use of Taxpayer Money" in the local newspaper's reader survey. "People can see results," says Perrine. They want "to know that the money they are contributing to the municipality is making a difference.... It's quite manifest. Harrisonburg has been revitalized."

"Not only have I seen Harrisonburg through the lens of a state Main Street coordinator, I've also seen it as a student, as a volunteer, and even as a Main Street staffer. HDR's investment and dedication from the local community are astounding."

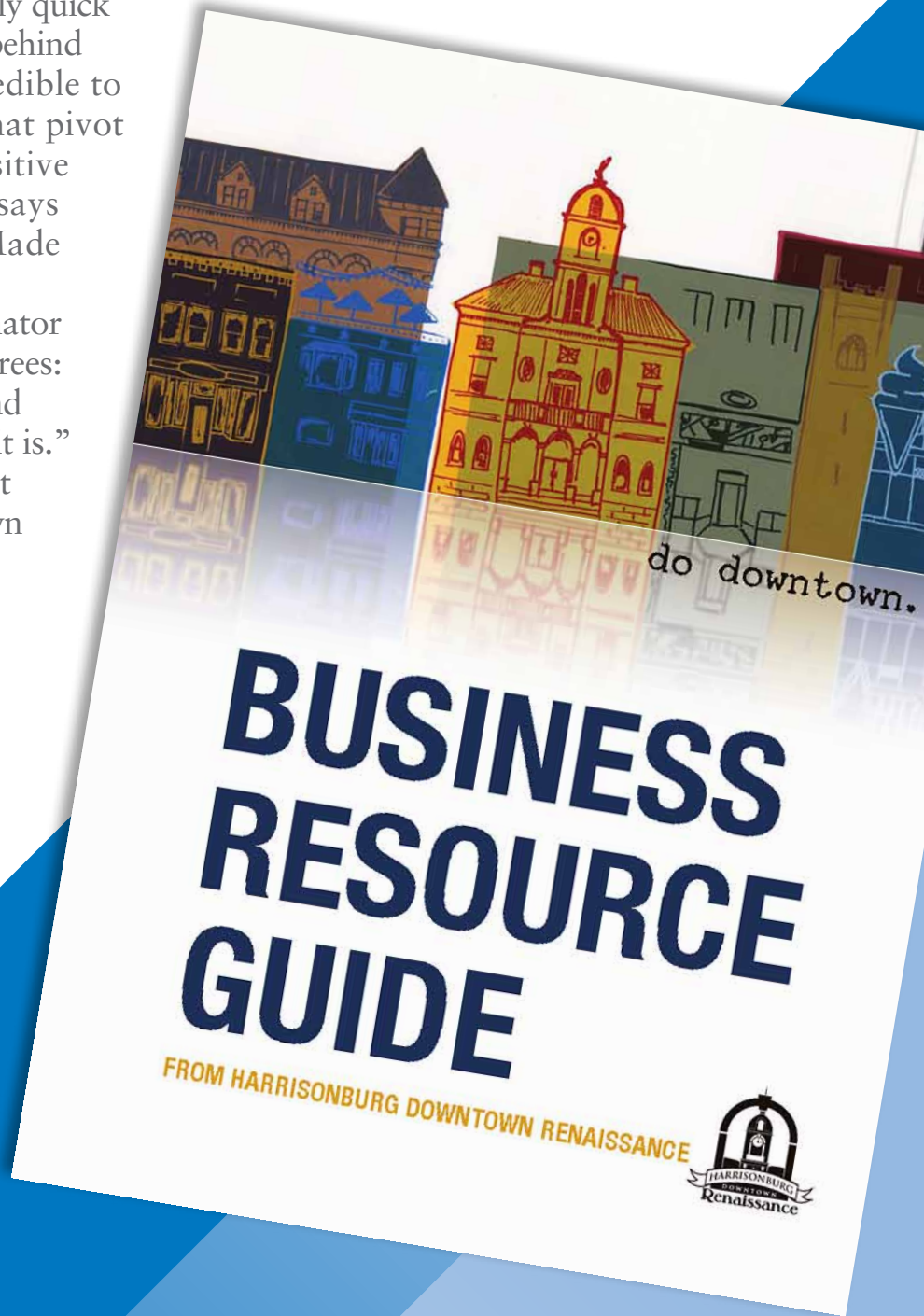
ALEXIS THOMPSON, VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM MANAGER

Business owners have been equally quick to credit HDR as the driving force behind downtown's success. "It's just incredible to see them work so effectively as that pivot point for steering change in a positive direction that has benefited all," says David Miller, co-owner of You Made It!, a downtown pottery studio.

Ariana Witt, Marketing Coordinator of the Friendly City Food Co-op agrees: "HDR is really the spearhead behind this downtown being as vibrant as it is."

Downtown Harrisonburg has not only become a desirable place to own a business and to work; it has also become the cool place to live.

"There are so many times when I can hear music coming from downtown into my apartment," says Witt, "and it's great because I can get up, walk out, and be there in two seconds."



HDR and the City of Harrisonburg have worked together to create many incentives and resources for downtown entrepreneurs. Harrisonburg has a Downtown Technology Zone that provides tax incentives for qualifying businesses, as well as such resources as a Business Recruitment Guide, web listings of available downtown properties, a BizLoan microloan program, and a Business Resource Guide.



LIVING LARGE IN A SMALL TOWN

In 2003, when HDR was launched, downtown housing was sparse, consisting of 150 units, almost all affordable housing. Today, the district has more than 500 units, many of which are upscale or luxury apartments, with approximately 50 more under construction or nearing completion.

Vice-Mayor Charles Chenault points out with pride that “most of the living space downtown has been developed in old warehouse buildings and types of businesses that don’t maybe fit in the downtown anymore. They’ve been just wonderfully repurposed.”

From the beginning, HDR planned to make downtown housing a priority. Downtown living could energize the street, with more people out and about, walking to

shops, restaurants, or just enjoying the fresh air and meeting friends. “By having more people living downtown,” says Bumbaugh, “we could create a strong base for retail shops and restaurants.”

While downtown Harrisonburg had numerous buildings ripe for rehabilitation and adaptive use, Bumbaugh felt certain steps were needed for such projects to be feasible. “We were the only city in the Shenandoah Valley that didn’t have a historic district,” he recalls. “If I had to pick the biggest effort that facilitated increasing the number of housing units downtown, it would be getting listed in the National Register so we could become eligible for federal and state historic tax credits.”



Downtown housing was an early priority of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. The catalyst for housing projects was the City Exchange, a 1911 50,000-sq.ft. building that has been transformed into a luxury apartment complex with 32 apartments through the use of historic tax credits. (before, opposite page; after, above).

The Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District was placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register in December 2004 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in January 2005.

The catalyst project for downtown housing was the City Exchange. Local developers Andrew Forward and Barry Kelley used historic tax credits to turn this 1911 50,000-square-foot building into a beautiful luxury apartment complex with 32 apartments and a popular farm-to-table restaurant. The apartment complex has been fully rented since day one and any vacancies are quickly snapped up.

Preserving this landmark building was high on Forward and Kelley's agenda. "Tearing the building down meant you'd

lose an opportunity of a lifetime," says Forward. "Today, there is no economically feasible way to build a four-story brick structure of that quality, especially not with those character-defining elements of exposed wood and high ceilings."

Tenants of this and other downtown apartment complexes, such as Livery Lofts, love the atmosphere inside the buildings and out. "I love being downtown. I can walk everywhere," says Caroline McTier, a tenant of Livery Lofts. "I went and looked at several apartments and when I walked into this one, I just fell in love with the high ceilings and the brick wall. I just love how they took such an old space and were able to modernize it but still keep all of the original features so it's still very interesting."



Every year, notes Perrine, “more and more students move to Harrisonburg and decide ‘Wow, not only is it a beautiful place, the Shenandoah Valley, but it also has a little urban thing going on.’ We’re seeing more students sticking around, year after year.”

Downtown’s unique apartment complexes, growing number of restaurants and retail shops, and reputation as a “walker’s paradise” are attracting not only students and young professionals but baby boomers as well. Residents of all ages feel like they have the best of two worlds. Many

say they no longer feel like they are living in a small town because their homes have a chic, urban vibe; at the same time, they are able to walk everywhere they need to go.

“For me, it’s a perfect fit,” says McTier, “because I love being able to go out and experience all the different events they have on the square and I don’t have to worry about driving. I can just walk down the stairs, go out, and enjoy downtown.... There’s always something going on so it’s never dull; it’s never boring. I just think it’s a very fun place to be.”

Downtown Harrisonburg has 500 housing units, which attract residents of all ages. Main Street’s unique apartments have a chic, urban vibe that gives residents the best of two worlds. They feel like they’re living in a metropolitan area, but they can walk anywhere they want to go.



PRIDE IN THE PAST, FAITH IN THE FUTURE

Harrisonburg's preservation ethic has not been limited to downtown housing. Before HDR was formed, says Bumbaugh, Harrisonburg was often criticized as lacking a commitment to preservation. Significant buildings were torn down, others deteriorated, and the town had no organized voice calling for historic preservation.

After HDR was launched, a significant change took place. Buildings that once would have been lost, notes Bumbaugh, have been saved and renovated, and public policy now places value on the community's historic resources. The city's most recent Comprehensive Plan includes an entire section on "historic resources."

Harrisonburg is a city of distinctive charm, with many significant historic buildings. The downtown is dominated by the imposing Romanesque/Renaissance Revival Courthouse, built in the 1890s.





© Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

The Livery Lofts (above) is one of the signature historic preservation projects in downtown Harrisonburg. It features 12 upscale apartments, a vintage furniture shop, and a wood-fired pizza restaurant, the Bella Luna (opposite page).

Buildings such as the 1750s Harrison House, built by the city's founder, and the Smith House, one of downtown's oldest remaining homes were rescued from potential demolition. The Smith House now serves as office and gallery space for the town's Valley Arts Council. In 2013, renovation of three additional buildings, representing an investment of more than \$15 million, was either started or completed.

- The West Bruce Street project includes a restaurant, architecture firm, and an online higher education service;

- The Livery project features a pizza restaurant, a vintage furniture shop, and 12 upscale apartments; and
- The Ice House project, with more than 130,000 square feet of space, will house several JMU departments, two restaurants, a brewery, a jewelry shop and museum, a yoga/pilates studio, and 35 upscale apartments.

This pride and commitment to preserving Harrisonburg's past has captured the interest of potential business



owners. Wade Luhn, former co-owner of a business in Staunton, Virginia, is one of the tenants of The Livery. His Bella Luna Wood-Fired Pizza restaurant opened there this past January.

Why did Luhn choose Harrisonburg? Over the past few years, he observed a steady growth of small business startups and a number of building owners and developers committed to rehabbing the downtown's dilapidated historic buildings and warehouses.

"This bodes well for the future economic vibrancy of downtown," says Luhn, "and bolsters interest in economic involvement in Harrisonburg."

Despite its many successes, HDR is not content to rest on its laurels. HDR's vision for the future, says Bumbaugh, includes a new hotel and conference center, an urban park, a greenway through downtown, a new city hall, additional streetscape phases, renovation of the city founder's historic home, a new mixed-use parking deck, additional adaptive-use projects such as the Ice House, and public art projects, collectively representing public and private investment of approximately \$80 million. A new branding strategy is also in the works.



Faith in the future of downtown has spread throughout the community. “The heart of our city is beating vibrantly again,” says local developer Barry Kelley.

Main Street is “sustainable; it’s inclusive; it’s vibrant. People just love being downtown,” says Perrine.

“Our revitalization is real,” adds Bumbaugh. “The Main Street approach works, and our downtown embodies a national model for high standards,” an opinion with which Virginia Main Street Coordinator Alexis Thompson wholeheartedly agrees.

“Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance sets the gold standard as a Virginia Main Street community,” says Thompson.

But perhaps the best praise comes from downtown residents like Ariana Witt. “Now people are saying, ‘Oh, I don’t ever have to leave downtown because it has everything I need,’” says Witt.

With such faith and pride in the downtown by residents, workers, entrepreneurs, city officials, and HDR, downtown Harrisonburg is well on the way to a long and bright future. ★

Downtown Harrisonburg is growing more lively every day, attracting new residents and customers as well as business owners. Many downtowners are looking at Main Street with a new eye, saying “Oh, I don’t ever have to leave downtown because it has everything I need.”

Watch
the Harrisonburg
Downtown
Renaissance
GAMSA
video.





BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 2003
CITY POPULATION: 48,914

BUSINESS MIX

RETAIL: 54
RESTAURANTS: 28
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 90
OFFICES: 130
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 13

1,200
NET NEW JOBS

64
NET NEW BUSINESSES

167
BUILDING REHABS

6
NEW BUILDINGS

355
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

10%
VACANCY RATE WHEN
PROGRAM STARTED

3.5%
CURRENT VACANCY RATE



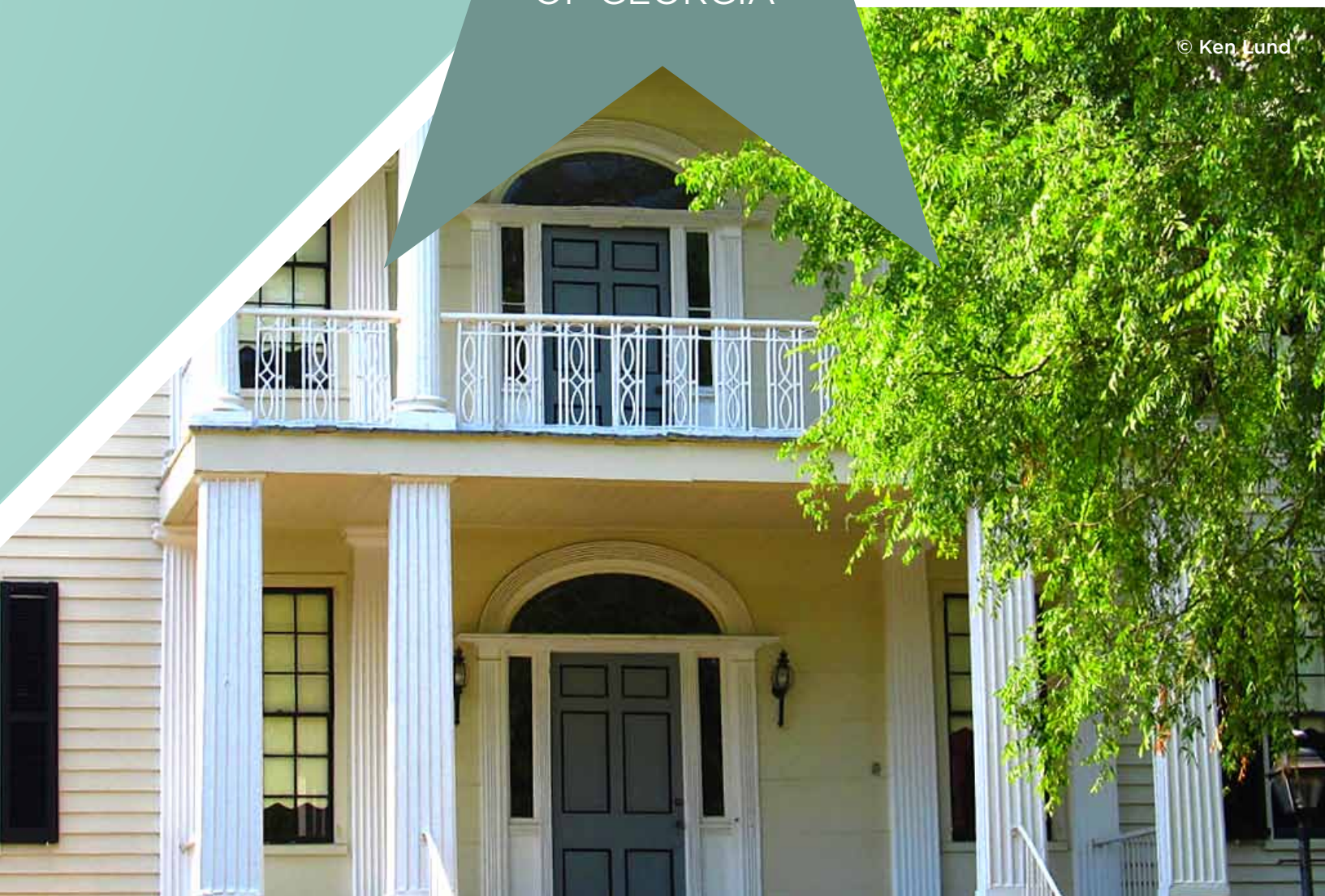
*Live music scene in
downtown Harrisonburg.*



MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA

"FIRST LADY
OF GEORGIA"

© Ken Lund





© Jim Davis

The fourth capital city of Georgia, from 1804 to 1868, Milledgeville attracted great wealth and power that led to construction of beautiful Federal-style mansions (left) and the imposing Old Capitol Building (above), America's first Gothic Revival public building, which today sits in all its resplendent glory in the center of the Georgia Military College campus.

Milledgeville, Georgia, has a unique and distinct history. The fourth capital city, after Savannah, Augusta, and Louisville, Milledgeville served as the antebellum capital of the state from 1804 to 1868. Named after Governor John Milledge, the city was carved out of the frontier wilderness and modeled after Savannah and Washington, D.C. In 1868, however, the capital was moved to Atlanta, a city emerging as a symbol of the New South, much as Milledgeville symbolized the Old South.

The wealth and power that gravitated to Milledgeville during the early and mid-1800s led to construction of elegant mansions, with large porticoes, balconies, and fanlighted doorways in the Federal style, and the beautiful Old Capitol Building, with pointed arched windows and battlements that marked it as America's first Gothic Revival public building. Despite significant damage during the Civil War, the building survived and now sits in all its restored glory at the center of the Georgia Military College campus.



Milledgeville is a “history buff’s paradise,” says Carlee Schulte, Executive Director of Milledgeville Main Street/ Downtown Development Authority (DDA). “The buildings have been beautifully restored and the historic core is the pride of the city.”

Ten years ago, that wasn’t the case. “The look was very different then,” says Schulte. “We had a lot of blighted buildings. Many needed paint and other improvements.”

The Main Street program was created in 1988 and worked with the Downtown Development Authority to invest in downtown improvements. In 2003, the City of Milledgeville, responding to increased activity in the commercial district, decided “it was important to invest in the success

of downtown,” says Schulte, “and began working on the first of four phases of streetscape projects.... Two million dollars have been spent on the projects thus far.”

In 2007, the Main Street program became a city department. “What we have done since then is to try and reinvent ourselves,” says Mayor Richard A. Bentley. “We’ve been able to dedicate tax money to our downtown because we know how important it is.”

Mayor Bentley credits Milledgeville Main Street with downtown’s resurgence: “The program’s use of the Main Street four points has provided our city with a vibrant core that attracts the local community and visitors alike while staying true to the historic context of the city.”



Today, Milledgeville is a history buff’s paradise, with beautifully restored buildings in its historic core. Ten years ago, that wasn’t the case; the downtown had a lot of blighted buildings that needed paint and other improvements.





© Ken Lund

Georgia College's \$6.9 million renovation of the 1935 Art Deco Campus Theatre created a black box theatre, as well as office space and a bookstore for the school. This rehab has been a catalyst for economic development in downtown Milledgeville.

TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT

“Over the past 10 years our 50/50 façade matching grant [which offers up to \$1,500 per applicant] has really transformed the downtown,” says Schulte.

Of all the rehabs that have taken place, the two projects most often credited with jumpstarting downtown’s revitalization are the Campus Theatre and Baldwin Lofts.

In 2008, Georgia College purchased and rehabbed a downtown landmark, the Art Deco Campus Theatre, which opened in 1935 and served as a traditional performance hall

for nearly half a century before closing in 1983. When it opened, says Kyle Cullers of Georgia College, “it was one of the premier theatres of the time. It was important to us to take care of our facilities, especially our historic facilities, so we wanted to be sure that we kept the architectural integrity of the building. We did a full restoration of the exterior; the façade we took back to its original glory. We were able to reuse the interior of the space while saving the exterior.”



Frank Pendergast, the owner of The Brick, was one of the first entrepreneurs to take a risk and open a restaurant downtown. The Brick has become a downtown icon and led Pendergast to tackle other major projects.



Totaling \$6.9 million, the renovation created a black-box theatre, office space, and a bookstore in the building. “This creative project transformed a historic but dilapidated 75-year-old icon that had been closed for 25 years into a revitalized, vibrant facility that serves as a high-foot-traffic academic space,” says Schulte.

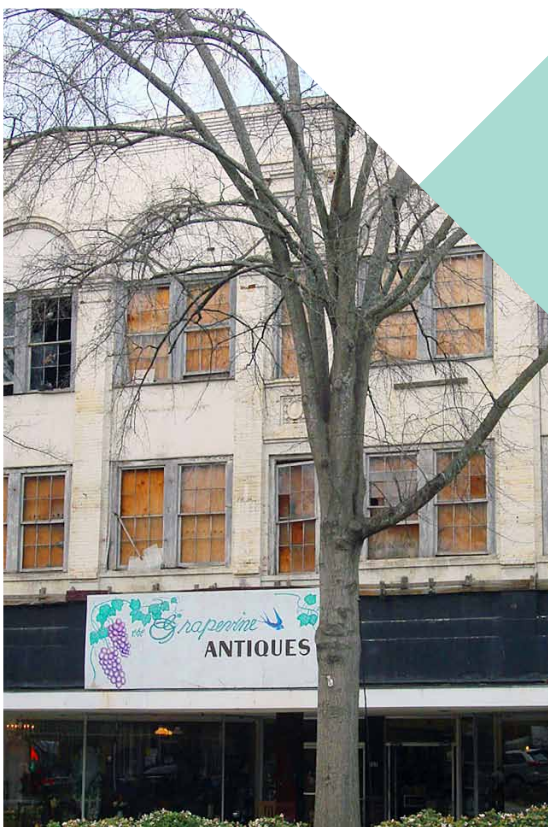
The project has been recognized throughout the state for its excellence in design and its impact on the revitalization of the community, winning the 2010 Best Commercial Redevelopment Activity from the Georgia Downtown Authority, the 2011 Georgia Trust Excellence in Rehabilitation Award, and the 2010 University System of Georgia Public/Private Ventures Award.

Making an equally strong impact on the downtown is the Baldwin Lofts project. Frank Pendergast, a local developer, was one of the first entrepreneurs to take a risk and open a restaurant downtown “when no one else would,” says Schulte.

The Brick has become a downtown icon and led Pendergast to tackle another major project. Constructed in 1903 and originally named the Horne Building after the mayor at that time, the property survived fire, tornadoes and a massive slip cover put up by Belk Department Store when it purchased the building in 1946.

“This project had to be exceptionally creative,” says Schulte. “The building was too large for any one entity” until Pendergast considered the need for residential options downtown.

The Baldwin Lofts, Pendergast’s second major project, converted a large 1903 building that had survived fire, tornadoes, and a massive slip cover put up by Belk Department Store in 1946 into an apartment and retail complex. The \$4 million project has added 15 apartments and 2 retail spaces to the downtown. (Before, below left; After, below right.)





The building had an addition on the back that made it a perfect space to be converted into residential lofts. “We took out 30 feet of the roof and 30 feet of the first floor,” says Pendergast. That allowed him to create an internal courtyard for residents and basement apartments. The \$4 million project, which has added 15 apartments and two retail spaces to the downtown, received the 2013 Award of Excellence Gold Medal from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and the Georgia Downtown Association.

It’s also winning the approval of downtown residents. “For me, it was a really great opportunity,” says Baldwin

Lofts resident Tatum O’Keefe. “It’s just a hop, skip, and a jump to class. Not only that, but everything we need is here.”

Margaret Smith, another Baldwin Lofts resident, agrees: “When you have a city like Milledgeville that has so much history, I think it’s a shame to knock it all down. It’s a waste of something that could be really cool.”

Preserving that “really cool” past has become easier with the success of these two projects.

“There are currently three large renovation projects that will provide at least 10 commercial spaces and 20 residential lofts within the next year and a half,” says Schulte. “These rehabilitations will pour another \$2 million into the district.”

Over the last three years, 24 buildings have been renovated, totaling more than \$55 million in public and private investment downtown. Milledgeville Main Street has also taken advantage of state incentives by utilizing the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund and the Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund, which provide below-market rate financing to fund capital projects.

But Milledgeville Main Street’s most creative initiative—and the one that clearly shows the love of townsfolk for their downtown—is the BOOST program, a community-driven financial incentive.

The Baldwin Lofts interior courtyard was an innovative way to create space for additional basement apartments and provide a private oasis for residents in the heart of downtown.





Supporters of the Milledgeville Downtown Development Authority's BOOST initiative prepare to surprise one of the first grant recipients, Blossom's Florist, with a \$1,000 check. In 2013, BOOST gave out \$6,000 and is on track to award \$8,000 in 2014. While Milledgeville Main Street oversees the program, it is the donors who determine which businesses get the grants.

“GETTING YOUR BOOST ON”

BOOST “is a grassroots program,” says Donna Collins, Vice Chair of the Milledgeville Main Street/DDA Board and downtown business owner. “It’s people helping people. We have donors who give \$100 twice a year. That money goes into a pool and business owners can apply for grants, which do not have to be repaid.”

BOOST grants, which range from \$100 to \$1,000, are awarded quarterly to selected businesses and can be used for marketing,

advertising, making interior or exterior renovations, and purchasing equipment, among other things. “These grants assist businesses with small but essential expenses that can often make a big difference when starting or growing a business,” says Schulte.

“We needed signage. We needed a security system. We needed ways to help us save money so we applied for the BOOST grant,” says Tommy Cook, owner of Need a Nerd, a startup business in downtown Milledgeville. “It was great. Everyone runs



Amici Italian Café (left and opposite page) was one of three businesses that received \$1,000 awards in 2013 when the BOOST program was first rolled out. The café used the grant for needed roof repairs.

in the door, holds up a check with balloons, and shouts ‘you’ve been BOOSTed!’”

“People feel really good about making donations and helping others,” says Collins.

Since it was rolled out in the fall of 2013, the BOOST program has awarded \$6,000 in grants and is on track to give out \$8,000 in 2014. The program, which has garnered a lot of media attention on the local, regional, and national levels, is sending the strong message that Milledgeville welcomes and recognizes the investment entrepreneurs make in the downtown.

Milledgeville Main Street oversees the program, but it’s the donors who decide which businesses will get the money. “This partnership has given the locals and the business owners and employees a new sense of pride,” says Schulte. “I think it’s going to pick up momentum and people are really going to be interested in it, as far as applying and being involved. It’s time to get your BOOST on!”

Over the past three years, Milledgeville has seen a growth of 91 net new jobs, along with 27 new and 3 business



expansions. The financing tools Milledgeville has developed on its own, as well as the incentives it has accessed through its partnership with the state, ensure that the community will continue on its path of economic growth.

MILLEDGEVILLE'S BIGGEST DAY

Beautifully preserved buildings, businesses that range from trendy boutiques to a jewelry store celebrating 127 years downtown, more than a dozen dining options from upscale elegance to down-home barbecue, and a late-night scene that offers live entertainment and late-night drink specials give locals and visitors plenty of reasons to come downtown. But there are some special days as well, from a

moonlight dinner on the lawn of Georgia Military College and the annual JazzFest on the campus of Georgia College to “Milledgeville’s Biggest Day”—the annual Deep Roots Festival.

An award-winning music and cultural event, the Deep Roots Festival was launched as a reboot of Fest-O’Ville, an event held on the Georgia College campus. As attendance and revenue for the campus event declined, Milledgeville Main Street decided to take a few years off and develop a new festival concept.

First named the Sweetwater Festival when it was started in 2004, the event took on the name Deep Roots in 2009. According to Pendergast, the chair of the festival, Deep Roots refers not only to the



The Deep Roots Festival is Milledgeville's "Biggest Day," bringing crowds of 15,000 (opposite page, bottom) into the heart of the city to enjoy performances by up-and-coming musical acts (opposite page, top), arts and crafts vendors, kids' activities, and a vintage car show (right).



canopies of trees that line Milledgeville's streets but also to the deep ties townsfolk have to their past and to each other.

Milledgeville Main Street serves as the host and organizational hub for the one-day event, which is held on a Saturday in October. The festival features performances by up-and-coming musical acts, an artist and crafts market, activities for kids, a classic car show, and a barbecue contest.

The event, says Schulte, "has a knack for discovering up-and-coming artists such as Grace Potter, the John Butler Trio Band, and Stokeswood, as well as old favorites like the Dirty Guv'nahs and Chris Thomas King before they hit it big."

The festival also pulls the community together, involving the work of more than 100 volunteers throughout the year and 50 who work on the day of the event, which grows larger each year. In 2004, the festival attracted about 5,000 attendees; by 2010, that number had tripled to 15,000. The crafts market has grown in the same proportion, the number of vendors tripling from 25 in 2004 to 70 in 2011.

Along with the fun it provides community residents and out-of-town visitors, the event's biggest impact is financial. In 2013, says Schulte, "this-one day festival had a \$1.1 million impact on the local economy." Many business owners say the Deep Roots

Festival is the busiest day of their year, with some reporting an increase of 250 percent in sales, compared to their regular Saturdays.

The event also helps fund Milledgeville Main Street. The majority of the event's revenue goes to the 50/50 Façade Matching Grant program. "Over the past few years, revenue from the festival has provided more than \$10,000 to downtown businesses for their improvements," said Schulte in an interview



© Ryan Myers



© Maryllis Wolfgang



© Maryllis Wolfgang

“Development in Milledgeville’s downtown in the past two years is representative of a community where unique ideas are embraced; and economic growth and prosperity, within the context of historic preservation, is nurtured,”

BILLY PEPPERS, EDFP

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

with *Milledgeville Living Magazine*. The rest of the money goes back into the festival reserves for the next year's event.

Like many of Milledgeville Main Street's initiatives, the Deep Roots Festival has won numerous awards—receiving more than 30 Kaleidoscope Awards from the Southeast Festival and Events Association since its inception—and garnered major media attention for the community.

But while Deep Roots is Milledgeville's biggest day, it's not the only activity that brings people downtown for fun and entertainment. Now in its fourth year, the Main Street First Friday event has been growing in popularity. Each month has a different theme. Among the most exciting is an annual beach bash.

Milledgeville may be located more than two hours from an actual beach, says Schulte, “but we haven't let that stop us from providing a fun family event that allows our patrons to kick off their flip-flops and get sandy!” Sixty tons of sand from a local sand distributor are dumped in a closed parking lot and kiddie pools are filled with water, sand buckets, shovels, and beach balls.

First Friday events have included Chili Eating Contests, School Spirit Nights, Car Shows, and 80s Costume Contests, to name a few. Not only is First Friday great fun for the people who attend; it's also a revenue producer for the businesses that stay open and provide their own tie-in promotions for the crowds.

Events like the Downtown Beach Bash (below), which drops 60 tons of sand in a closed parking lot with kiddie pools, beach balls, and sand buckets, and the Back to School Blow Out cheerleading competition (opposite page) bring hundreds of young people and adults downtown to enjoy the fun.



The Milledgeville Marketplace Farmers Market is another major venue for outdoor activity downtown. Now in its fifth year, the market brings live entertainment and artwork, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables downtown every Tuesday afternoon from April to October. On average, says Schulte, “the market brings 18 vendors and more than 500 customers downtown each Tuesday.”

To provide a more inviting location for the market, Milledgeville Main Street applied for and received a \$42,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, while the city kicked in an additional \$61,000 to build a pavilion for the market. The pavilion, which opened this spring, provides electricity, outdoor fans, beautiful landscaping, and much-needed shelter from the hot Georgia sun, says Schulte.

TRANSFORMING IDEAS INTO ACTION

The efforts of Milledgeville Main Street give community residents and visitors plenty of reasons to explore the city’s historic core. With support from the city and other public and private partners, Main Street has preserved the history of downtown buildings, created events to draw participants from surrounding areas, found funding to build a pavilion for the farmers market and created unique financial incentive programs to attract a unique mix of thriving businesses.

“We have a really fun downtown atmosphere,” says Jon Joiner, owner of Milledgeville’s Amici Café. “Everyone is working together. I’m starting to see some empty buildings now getting bought and other businesses, restaurants, and loft apartments, so it’s pretty cool.”





The Milledgeville Marketplace Farmers Market is another major venue for outdoor activity. Now in its fifth year, the market brings live entertainment and artwork, as well as local produce, downtown every Tuesday afternoon from April to October. Before the market pavilion (left) was built, the area was a closed-down skate park. Now, it's a pleasant market with beautiful landscaping and much-needed shelter from the hot Georgia sun.

The vibrant business climate created by Milledgeville Main Street is convincing many graduates of the nearby colleges to choose the town as the place where they can build their future. “I’m an alum of Georgia College,” says Lindsey Smith, co-owner of The 42nd Floor. “I didn’t think when I graduated that I would ever come back to Milledgeville. But when you’re removed from it, you see that there is just so much potential here.”

That potential will keep Milledgeville Main Street driving forward. Main Street and the city have every intention of continuing preservation efforts in downtown Milledgeville. Business recruitment is another high priority.

“The vision of Milledgeville Main Street is to continue the growth of downtown and expand our reach to some of the outer blocks in the district,” says Schulte. “In the next few years, we plan to grow our current programs, explore new options for parking, and continue commercial recruitment to full capacity. I believe the future plans for a Main Street community must be a work that is ever evolving.” ★

Watch
the Milledgeville
Main Street
GAMSA
video.



BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 1988
CITY POPULATION: 19,401

BUSINESS MIX
RETAIL: 15
RESTAURANTS: 12
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 38
OFFICES: 3
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 6

394
NET NEW JOBS

154
NET NEW BUSINESSES

89
BUILDING REHABS

4
NEW BUILDINGS

22
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

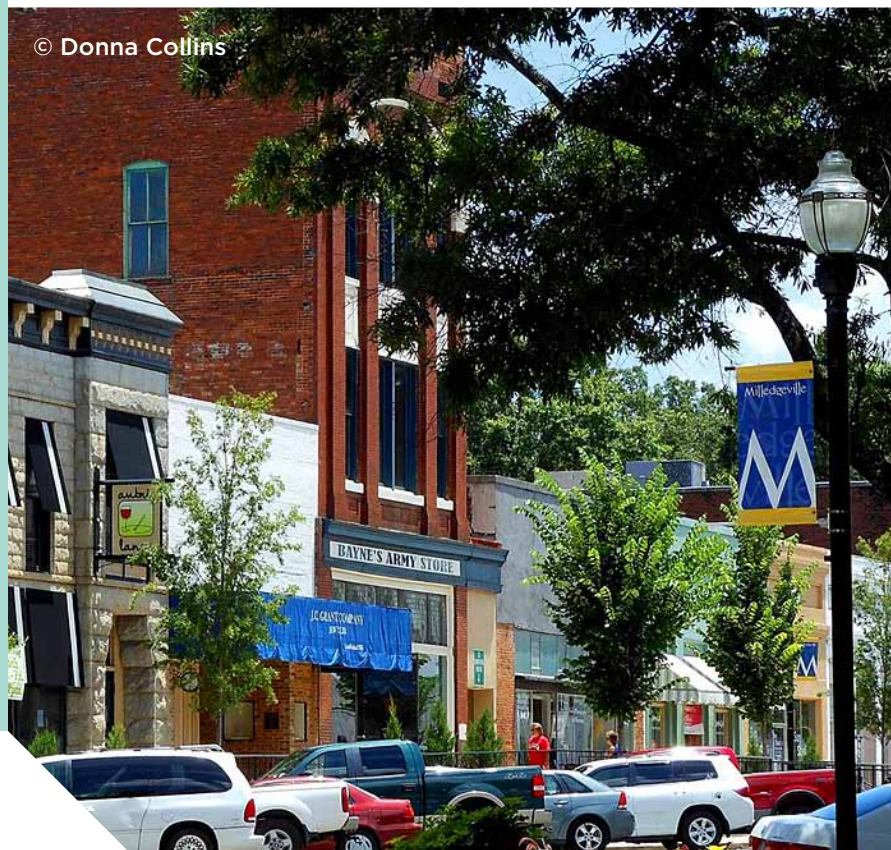
50%
VACANCY RATE WHEN
PROGRAM STARTED

8%
CURRENT VACANCY RATE

*Preservation-sensitive
rehabs, streetscape
improvements,
and banner
programs make
Milledgeville's
downtown
vibrant and
inviting.*



© Donna Collins



© Donna Collins



WOODBINE, IOWA

AMERICANA
ALIVE
AND WELL



A small town of less than 2,000 people, Woodbine, Iowa, is a slice of Americana. “Where else can you shop for antiques, fill a prescription, stare into a glass-blower’s furnace, check grain prices, look at upholstery swatches for your Model T, and slake your thirst at the new brewery, all in less than 52 steps?” extols Deb Sprecker, Program Director of Woodbine Main Street.

This iconic Midwest town features brick streets, flags on porches, no stop lights, and a friendly, funky Main Street district. It is also a major stop on the historic Lincoln Highway, a transcontinental roadway that runs from New York City to the West Coast.

Woodbine’s section of the highway, the longest remaining portion in Iowa, was bricked in 1921. As far back as the 1990s, city leaders valued the charming brick streets enough to embark on a multimillion dollar, phased restoration of the highway. In January 2013, the restoration, now in its third and final phase, received an enormous boost when the Woodbine Lincoln Highway and Brick Street Historic Districts were listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Woodbine joined the Main Street Iowa family in 2008. When Woodbine became a Main Street town, says Main Street Board President Roger Kenkel, “downtown was hurting. Some businesses were closing.”

“The condition of Main Street had deteriorated and we knew it,” adds board member Bob Stephany.

Since it joined Main Street Iowa, Woodbine has never looked back. Its Main Street success is a story of resilience and resolve, of a community willing to take a hard look at the hand it’s been dealt, then dig in to make something better out of it.

COMMITTED, CONVINCED, AND CREATING CHANGE

Woodbine Main Street, the City of Woodbine, and the Woodbine Community Betterment & Development Corporation have joined together to implement the Main Street Four Point Approach®. City officials, including the mayor, city administrator, and city clerk, and educators serve on the Main Street board

To celebrate the completion of a 23-building façade rehab project, Iowa Governor Terry Branstad came to town for a ribbon cutting. The community restaged a 1911 Chautauqua Parade, complete with vintage vehicles from ascending decades and a large John Deere tractor bringing up the rear.



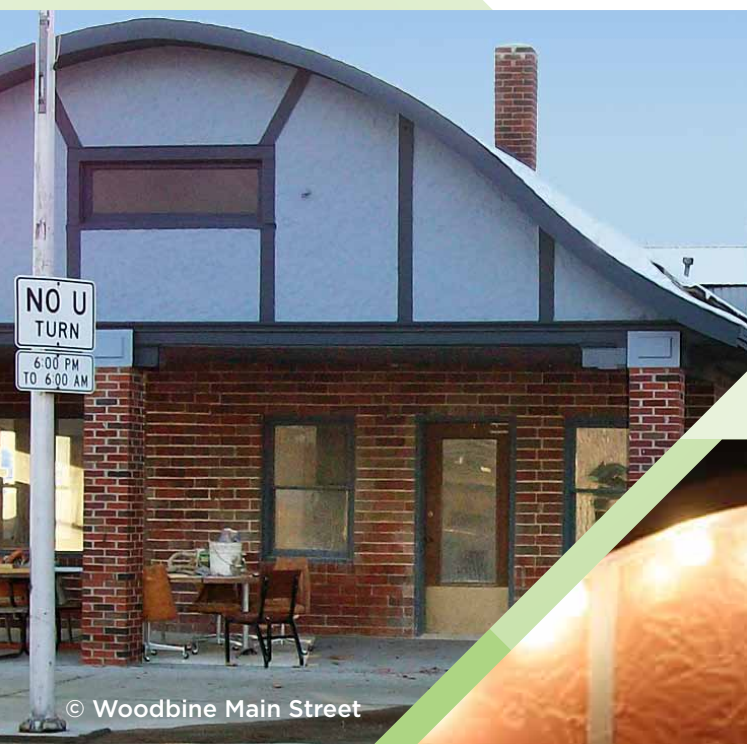


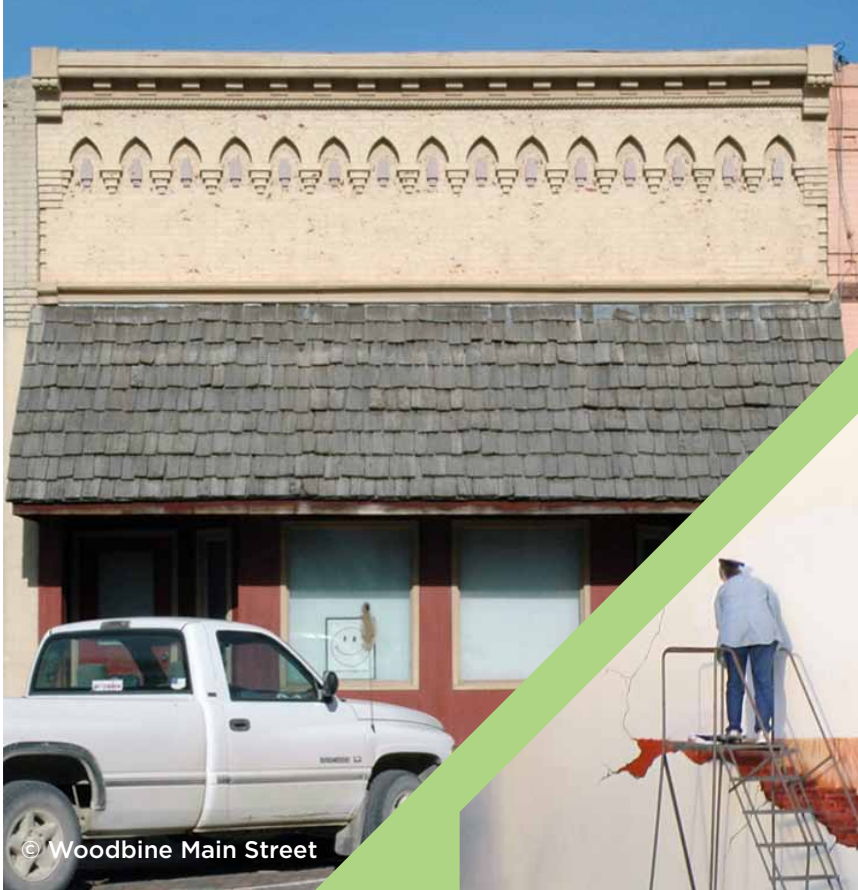
This 1928 canopy gas station, rehabbed in 2010 (bottom), features an architectural eyebrow roofline and houses the Main Street office and a community meeting room in the garage bays. By retaining many service station elements, such as the garage doors which were left in the raised position, and the auto lift as the pedestal for a glass conference table, the building is not only functional but faithful to its original appearance.

and four-point committees, while Woodbine Betterment works in tandem with Main Street and the city to recruit businesses, renovate commercial space, and share the management of upper-story housing.

Action plans laid out by the Main Street committees have produced dramatic building improvements from “paint and polish” projects to substantial building renovations.

One of the major tools Woodbine has leveraged to revitalize its commercial district, says Main Street Iowa State Coordinator Michael Wagler, “has been the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG).”





© Woodbine Main Street



© Deb Sprecker

Two layers of shake shingles and other coverings were peeled away from the Movers & Shakers building (above left) to reveal a beautiful intact storefront (above right). A mural is being painted on the side of the building (above) where the storefront is lit up every weeknight to spotlight tap dancers and karate kids.

The City of Woodbine was awarded a \$500,000 Downtown Revitalization Community Development Block Grant as part of a \$900,000 Façade Master Plan to renovate 23 buildings in the Main Street District. Completed in January 2012 through a partnership of individual business owners, the City of Woodbine, and Woodbine Main Street, these rehabs have had a significant economic impact on the downtown, as underscored by the restoration of the Odd Fellows Building.

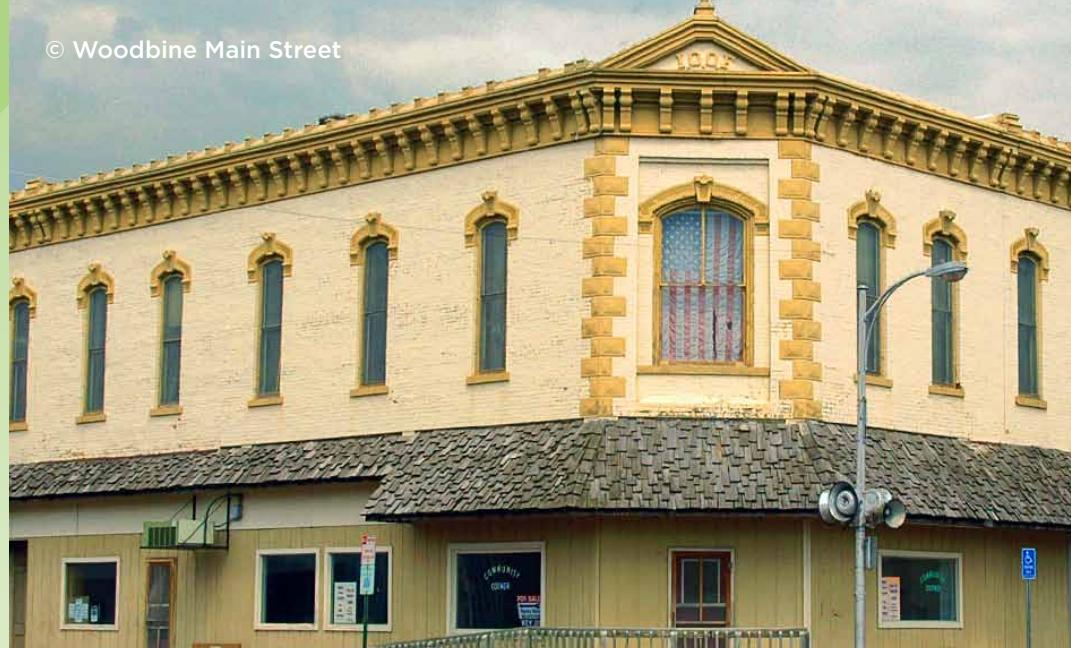
The owners redeveloped this late 19th-century, Italianate brick building using private funds, historic tax credits, and a number of grants. When the project began,

the two-story, flat-roofed building suffered from mortar damage, crumbling interiors, and an ill-conceived façade remodeling. Once a well-known regional department store as well as an Odd Fellows Lodge, the building holds strong memories for many older Woodbine residents, one of whom recalls thinking that the store's "oak stairway was the biggest, grandest thing ever."

The finished project added six two-bedroom apartments on the second floor, one apartment on the entry level, a full-service restaurant, and several office/retail spaces to the commercial district. Economically, the project not only has

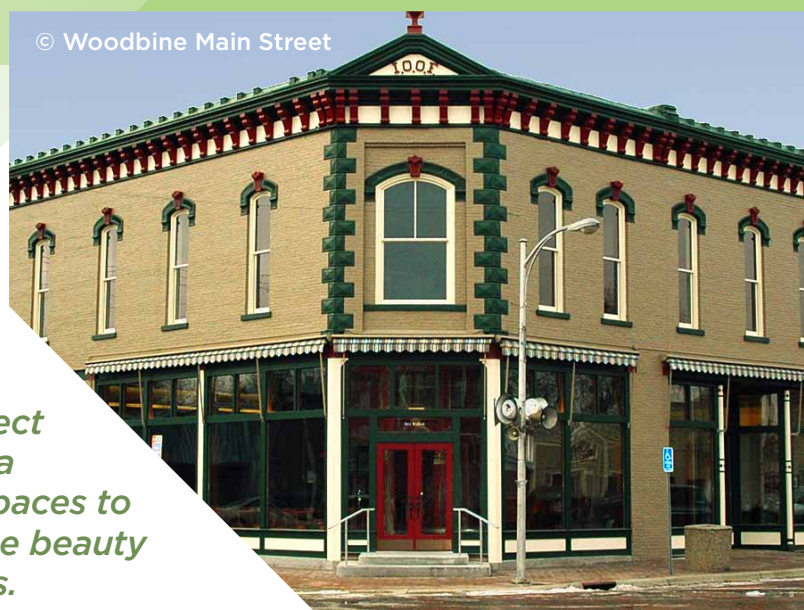


© Woodbine Main Street



© Woodbine Main Street

When the owners of Woodbine's 19th-century Italianate Odd Fellows Building began redeveloping the structure (above and above right), it suffered from mortar damage, crumbling interiors, and an ill-conceived façade remodeling. The finished project (right) has added seven apartments, a restaurant, and several office/retail spaces to the downtown, as well as restoring the beauty of one of Woodbine's iconic buildings.



© Woodbine Main Street

brought new jobs and services downtown but has pushed up the value of downtown real estate, its assessed value rising from \$18,038 in 2010 to \$205,968 in 2011.

Winner of the 2011 Iowa Preservation Award for "Best Commercial Rehab" and the 2011 Main Street Iowa Award for "Best Design-Total Building Rehab," the Odd Fellows restoration has helped spur other major projects.

The Woodbine Savings Bank project rescued an 1890s National Register

building. In 2008, the two-story brick structure, which housed several apartments, faced serious structural issues, so severe that the owners were seriously pondering whether to renovate or raze the building.

Working with Woodbine Main Street, the city, and a local development group, the owners put together a \$2.2 million renovation plan. Today, the building houses 11 affordable apartments, three office suites, an outdoor deck, and a communal area. All of the apartments were leased within six months.

Aaron Pryor, owner and manager of the Woodbine Savings Bank Apartments, is optimistic about downtown's future, thanks to the planning efforts and partnership between the city and Main Street Woodbine: "It's a lot more vibrant downtown, not just our building, but all the other buildings in town with the new façades and the façade master plan. A lot of people from neighboring towns are somewhat envious of the downtown we've created."

People like Pryor are the town's best business recruiters. The owner of a local antiques store, for example, convinced an out-of-town shopper to open a dental clinic and rehab two upper-story apartments in a

building that had been vacant for 10 years.

These and other projects have doubled the number of housing units downtown, from 16 apartments in 2008 to 32 today. And Woodbine's downtown housing is a hot commodity, rapidly becoming the preferred residential choice for newcomers, retirees, and downtown workers.

The allure of these downtown residences is not just their appearance; it's also their focus on sustainability.

The Woodbine Savings Bank project rescued an 1890s National Register building that was in such bad condition that the owners seriously considered razing the structure. Today, after a \$2.2 million renovation, the building (below) houses affordable apartments, office suites, an outdoor deck, and a communal area.



© Woodbine Main Street



© Woodbine Main Street



Greeting travelers at the city's gateway, a restored milk-carton-shaped grain elevator (right, historic photo; opposite page, today) beckons them to turn off the highway and explore Woodbine. Main Street teamed up with the farm cooperative and the city to turn an eyesore into public art through the use of sustainable materials.



GREEN SCENE

In 2008, the Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED) selected Woodbine as one of two Main Street communities to serve as pilots for its Green Streets Initiative. With the help of the city, IDED, and Cenergy, an independent and nationally certified business energy-use rating firm, Woodbine Main Street provided energy audits for the downtown's buildings. The audits assessed the amount of energy used by each building and suggested measures for improving energy efficiency.

"All 50 businesses had energy audits done," says Darin Smith of Arch Icon Development, noting that at first there was skepticism because of doubts about the return on investment.

These doubts were eventually outweighed by the value of the opportunity to revitalize the downtown. "Once we got going as a community" says Smith, "we couldn't stop."

Woodbine's focus on sustainability guided the design paths for downtown residential projects. The Woodbine Savings Bank Apartments has geothermal HVAC and other efficiencies that have garnered an energy savings of up to 35 percent.





A Sustainability Community Master Plan, commissioned by Woodbine Main Street in cooperation with the city in 2010, is being used to guide development by applying Iowa Green Streets criteria to downtown building improvements and residential development. Woodbine's focus on green infrastructure has led to projects that have improved livability in this small town:

- Use of native plants and landscaping downtown;
- Geothermal for historic rehabs;
- Rescue of a 1940s historic grain elevator as public art through the use of sustainable materials; and
- Storefront designs that apply energy efficiencies through restoration of inset doorways and transoms and the use of colorful awnings.

The arts scene is steadily growing in Woodbine, thanks to such galleries as the Artisan (below right). Restored in 2012 (below), the Artisan is a funky mix of an artist-in-residence co-op, craft store, gallery, and creative center. It also features a glass blowers' shop where artists from Omaha and the surrounding area convene. The Artisan hosts First Friday Community Gallery events where visitors can select art by dropping donations in a bucket.

Board President Kenkel looks at all of these accomplishments with pride and a bit of awe: "Some of the things that we thought could happen over time, maybe 10 years—the façade rehabs and [other projects]—have happened so quickly."

But while Woodbine's ride to Main Street success has been rapid, it hasn't always been smooth. In September 2013, Woodbine's downtown faced a disaster that would test the community's commitment to the district and its businesses.

RESILIENCE AND RESOLVE

On September 26, 2013, two days before Applefest, the community's biggest annual



© Woodbine Main Street



© Woodbine Main Street



Woodbine is not only a community of great pride but also of fierce resolve as their reaction proved after a devastating fire swept the downtown in September 2013, two days before the town's biggest event.

event, a devastating fire swept through the downtown. "The wind was strong out of the south and it was spreading," recalls Main Street Board Member Bill Hutcheson.

Council Member Randy Vandemark was one of the first people on the scene and says, "The first thing I thought of was this fire's going to be more than our community can handle."

But Woodbine is a community of fierce pride and strong resolve.

"I remember clearly that Thursday," says Nicole Eilers of Brick Street

Brewing. "Everybody was running down the street. We looked down there and there was the fire.... It was amazing to see the community pull together and show support for the businesses and the families that were affected."

Roger Eby of Eby Drug can attest to that support firsthand. "Not very long after the fire started down the street," says Eby, "people from the town showed up here and they were carrying totes and boxes. Even the high school volleyball team came down. The people in this town, in less than an hour, emptied this entire store."



As the fire roared through downtown, Woodbine residents rushed to the rescue of downtown businesses, emptying stores of merchandise to save their inventory (right). The fire damaged four buildings (opposite page), closing three businesses. While the damage was severe, it could have been much worse, noted one Main Street board member. “It could have been a whole block.”



The fire damaged four buildings, closing three businesses and forcing relocation of services for the senior meal site. “It could have been much more serious,” says Hutcheson. “We lost four storefronts, but it could have been a whole block.”

Twiners, as Woodbine residents are affectionately known, showed their resiliency as scores of volunteers came to the victims’ aid and began to think about rebuilding. “The people here in Woodbine will come together,” says Kimberly Jacobs of Roots and Rumors. “They will rebuild and bring it back, just like they rebuilt Main Street when it was starting to deteriorate.”

But the rebuilding has been thoughtful and focused on preserving the town’s historic assets. Instead of rushing in with a “hurry up and replace” mentality, Woodbine Main Street, Woodbine Betterment & Development, and the city pooled their resources to help owners restore their buildings and restart their businesses. Quick action was taken to stabilize the two-story façade of an 1880s building so it could be restored.

“Our partnership is focused on saving and restoring as many of the historic structures as possible,” says Main Street Director Deb Sprecker. “Without the experience derived from six years as a Main Street community, we might be on a different course.”



“I believe a key to Woodbine’s successes to date has been its ability to inspire and exert a consistent positive attitude. Through this messaging, Woodbine Main Street has been able to inspire community leaders to buy into the process, inspire downtown stakeholders to invest in their built environment, inspire community members to re-envision and experience what their downtown can be, and inspire other communities to take action in their own downtowns.”

MICHAEL WAGLER, STATE COORDINATOR, MAIN STREET IOWA



“Front and center in our mission statement,” she adds, “is to promote historic preservation, champion hometown vitality, and build community partnerships. Historic preservation is ingrained in our community psyche and embedded in our partnerships.”

So is strong resolve and optimism. Two days after the fire, Applefest, the town’s largest event, which attracts up to 15,000 people to this tiny town, went on, offering visitors a warm slice of pie and an even warmer welcome to Woodbine’s craft, flea, farmers, and fine arts markets.

The fire and its aftermath highlight what has been Woodbine’s story all along, says Sprecker. “Twiners take a hard look at what isn’t working, then dig in to make something better out of what they’ve been handed—and have a good time doing it.”

THE WOODBINE EFFECT

Woodbine’s accomplishments reflect the town’s pride and willingness to apply creative problem solving. While historic rehabs and building renovations kicked off the program’s early years, the six-block downtown has also

Woodbine’s strong will and optimism were never more apparent than two days after the fire when the community hosted its largest event, Applefest, which attracts up to 15,000 visitors to the tiny town. Visitors were greeted with candy apples, a warm slice of pie, and an even warmer welcome to craft, flea, farmers, and fine arts markets and the annual classic car show!



© Woodbine Main Street



© Deb Sprecker



© Deb Sprecker

The story of Woodbine's achievements is spreading throughout western Iowa, attracting visitors from all over the region. This mobile workshop tour group (above) steps off their bus and is welcomed by a "Spirit Tunnel" formed by Woodbine Community School students and their pep band. Students also put together "Why I Love My Hometown" welcome bags full of information, come-back coupons, and other treats for tour groups (right).

realized significant net gains in jobs and business starts and expansions: up 39 jobs, representing 23 percent of the current downtown employee base of approximately 200; and 22 business startups and expansions, 43 percent of the total number of storefront businesses. Presently, there is only one vacancy, "a 10-by-20-foot sliver of a storefront," says Sprecker.

Main Street has also hit key investment milestones from 2010 to 2012, receiving Main Street Iowa Reinvestment Mile Markers of \$2 million, \$3 million, and \$5 million in each of those years.

The story of Woodbine's achievements is spreading throughout western Iowa. Once we began work on our Façade Master Plan, Sprecker notes proudly, "our Main Street

volunteers hosted many regional visitors. One large group arrived in a school bus; others came in pairs or by carload. We welcomed them and told them our story."

These tours have created what some call the "Woodbine Effect." People returned home inspired by Woodbine's success. They began organizing community leaders, researching revitalization approaches and completing Main Street applications, says Sprecker. "Our philosophy—share our story with whoever will listen, whenever we can!"

And Woodbine has an important story to tell other small towns in which Main Street district boundaries can easily blur. "Students, families, businesses, and seniors 'get it,'" explains Sprecker. "The loss or deterioration of one sector seriously affects the whole. We



never discount the power of simply working together to accomplish our priorities.”

Woodbine’s revitalization comeback, concludes Sprecker, “boils down to a few important components: a fierce pride of place, an attitude that welcomes change; and stubborn, active community members who identify priorities, establish shared goals, and then get to work.”

“While many small towns are declining in population, our community has grown,” says Tracy Lee Kelley, a third-grade teacher at the Woodbine Community School. “It has grown not only in size but in visionary leadership fostered by community vitality and volunteerism. This is due to the Main Street program.”

Woodbine is proof that small-town life is alive and well in America and facing the future with eagerness, enthusiasm, and the determination to make their downtown the best that it can be. ★

Linda Glisson is the consulting editor of Main Street Now. She was a staff member of the former National Trust Main Street Center. Before joining the National Trust, she was a senior editor at US News & World Report Books and a free-lance editor for National Geographic Books. She has an associate of arts degree from the American University in Paris and a bachelor's degree in journalism from the George Washington University.

Watch
the Woodbine
GAMSA
video.

Commitment to Woodbine Main Street’s revitalization efforts involves “Twiners” of all ages. The program has a strong partnership with the local school. Students learn the art of window washing and take part in a grant-funded event that enables them to engage with business owners and learn about downtown’s historic buildings (below left). Adult volunteers not only contribute their time, talent, and energy; they contribute financially as well, as in this successful fundraiser that auctioned off more than 25 delectable desserts (below).



© Deb Sprecker





BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 2008
CITY POPULATION: 1,459

BUSINESS MIX
RETAIL: 10
RESTAURANTS: 3
SERVICE BUSINESSES: 19
OFFICES: 11
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: 5

39
NET NEW JOBS

22
NET NEW BUSINESSES

44
BUILDING REHABS

1
NEW BUILDING

14
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

10
vacant storefronts
VACANCY RATE WHEN
PROGRAM STARTED

1
vacant storefront
CURRENT VACANCY RATE



© Deb Sprecker



© Woodbine Main Street

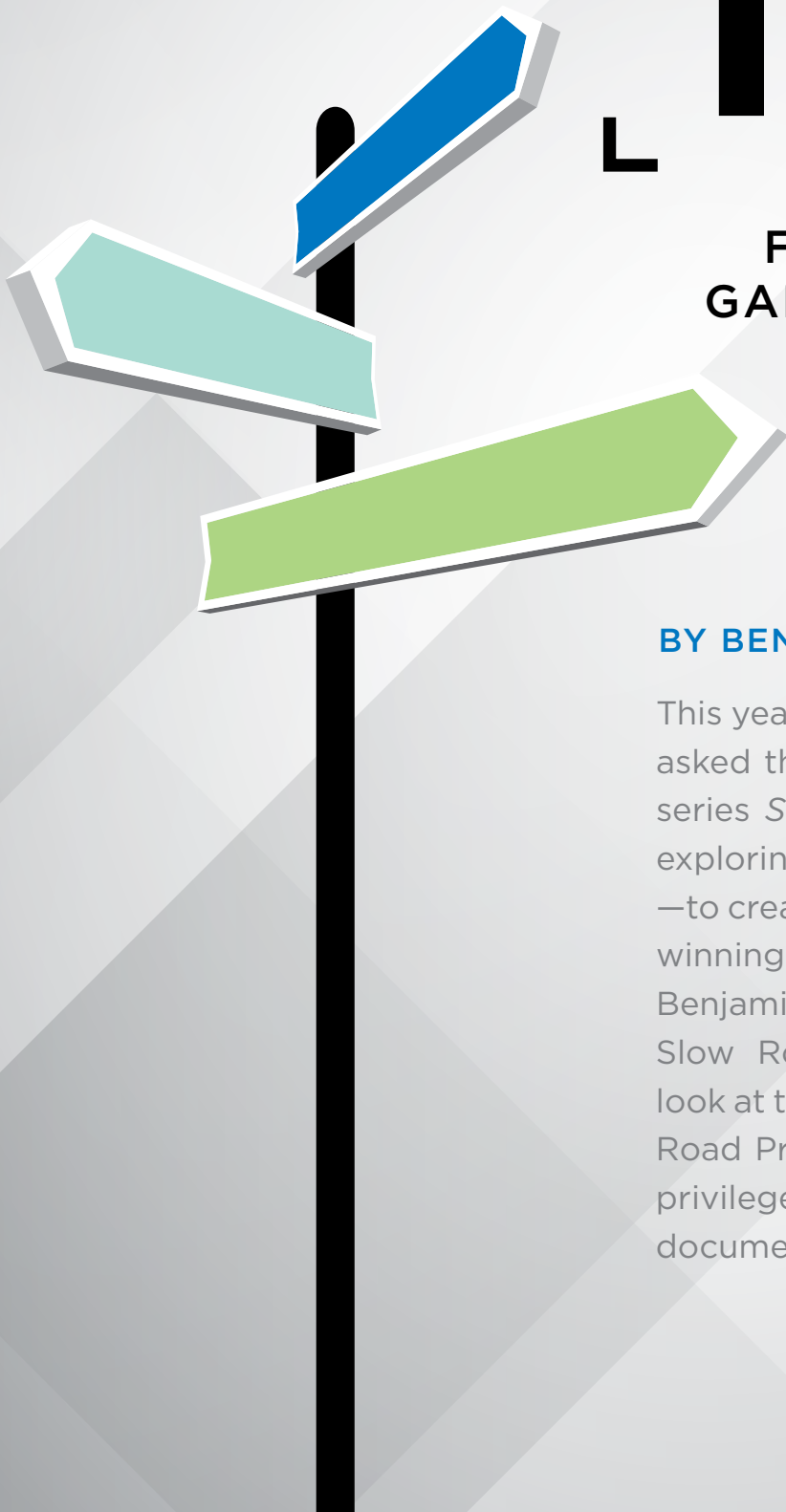


「ROAD」 TRIP」

FILMING THE 2014
GAMSA COMMUNITIES

BY BENJAMIN WOELK, SLOW ROAD

This year, the National Main Street Center asked the crew of the documentary film series *Slow Road*—a series dedicated to exploring Main Streets across the country—to create brief films of the three GAMSA winning communities. In this road diary, Benjamin Woelk, Founder and Host of Slow Road, gives a behind-the-scenes look at the places and people he and Slow Road Producer Jason Darnieder had the privilege of visiting and meeting on their documentary film journey.





© Slow Road

HARRISONBURG, VA

April 4-8th

*The MACROCK Festival at the
Clementine Café in Harrisonburg, Va.*

DAY 1

After driving 436 miles from Rochester, N.Y., on a beautiful sunny day we arrive in Harrisonburg, Virginia, at 7 pm. We grab our gear and head out to MACROCK an indie music festival, to begin our exploration of Harrisonburg with Eddie Bumbaugh, Executive Director of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance (HDR). After a whirlwind tour of downtown and dinner at the Clementine Café, we head back to the hotel to call it a night. Nine a.m. will come early with a full day ahead!

DAY 2

Morning: Our first stop is the HDR office at the historic Hardesty-Higgins House (circa 1853) where we interview Eddie. Later in the morning, we head over to the Ice House,

a mixed-use redevelopment project where the James Madison University (JMU) Communications and Marketing Office recently relocated. Andy Perrine, Board President of HDR, along with the developer and future business owners, gives us a tour of the former ice plant.

Afternoon: After lunch at the Union Station Restaurant and Bar, we interview a resident at the newly finished Livery Lofts in the converted historic Livery Building, which also houses the wood-fired pizza kitchen Bella Luna and Shabby Love, a vintage and reclaimed furniture shop.

DAY 3

Morning: The day starts when we meet several municipal officials, including Brian Schull, Director of Economic Development, in the Immerge Technologies offices, once home of the



Rockingham Motor Company—its reuse shows how Harrisonburg has moved from a center of manufacturing to a “technology zone.”

Afternoon: We have lunch at Blue Nile Ethiopian Cuisine, then interview Bethel Arefaine, an owner of the restaurant. After eating there, we realize why Harrisonburg is known for its culinary district! We finish the day by filming artists at work in the Larkin Arts building.

Slow Road films internationally known cyclist and mountain biker Jeremiah Bishop at the Harrisonburg Farmers Market.

DAY 4

Our last day starts as we interview Alexis Thompson, Virginia Community Development Manager, at the historic Joshua Wilton House. We then meet Jeremiah Bishop, internationally renowned cyclist and mountain biker, and head out to the Harrisonburg Farmers Market.

After filming the amazing community assets of Harrisonburg, including the iconic Court Square, we depart for Woodbine, Iowa, an overnight drive of 1,149 miles; 20 hours later we arrive in Woodbine!



WOODBINE, IA

April 9-12th

DAY 1

As we pull into Woodbine, we are immediately impressed by a grain elevator, which is nearly 90 feet tall, and the historic buildings and public art lining Main Street.

DAY 2

Morning: After breakfast at Bunk Down Café, we interview Woodbine Main Street Director Deb Sprecker in the Zell Millard Historic Preservation Park while pausing for the passing trains that go through Woodbine. We then head over to the Woodbine Main Street office, once a Canopy Gas station (circa 1928), to interview the board, where we learn about the fire that devastated their Main Street this past fall.

Afternoon: First we visit the Odd Fellows Building to meet the folks at Arch Icon Development, which recently adapted the space into residential units. Next, we head over to City Hall where we meet with the Mayor and City Council Member Randy Vandemark, who is also a volunteer firefighter who responded to the Woodbine fire in the Flower Shop; his voice is raw with emotion as he describes the scene.



*Slow Road Producer
Jason Darnieder
prepares to launch
a camera drone to
get aerial footage of
Woodbine, Iowa, and
show the scope of fire
damage to downtown.*



© Slow Road

The film crew sets up cameras in the new Woodbine Senior Center as they prepare to interview Iowa Main Street Coordinator Michael Wagler.

DAY 3

Morning: We begin our day by meeting the Pryor family who rehabbed and converted the Woodbine Savings Bank into apartments and a sustainability demonstration project that utilizes geothermal. I am immediately intrigued at the layers of “history and future” represented by this project. Later, we meet Michael Wagler, Iowa Main Street Coordinator, in the new Woodbine Senior Center, yet another example of an adaptive-use project.

Afternoon: We finally meet the legendary Zell Millard, introduced to us as the patriarch of the community. We interview him in his old offices,

now renovated into a dance studio. The evening wraps up at Brick Street Brewing where we interview Justin and Nicole Eilers, owners of Woodbine's first nano-brewery and learn about their commitment to craft beer—a commitment I had the chance to taste!

DAY 4

We spend our last day in Woodbine filming its beautiful architecture and launching a camera drone to capture aerial footage over Main Street to show the scope of the fire damage. We leave Woodbine on our 1,047 mile return trip home to Rochester, N.Y., feeling genuinely touched by the community.

MILLEDGEVILLE, GA

May 1-3rd

On April 30th, we set off on the 973-mile drive to Milledgeville, Georgia.

DAY 1

Morning: We arrive at the Milledgeville Main Street offices where we meet Carlee Schulte, Executive Director of Milledgeville Main Street. After interviewing Carlee, we are introduced to Billy Peppers, Director of the Georgia Office of Downtown Development.

Afternoon: We visit several restaurant owners, including Jon Joiner of Amici Café who expresses his enthusiasm that downtown Milledgeville is coming alive with more college students living here. I also speak with Chris Avirett, Manager at Blackbird Coffee who talks about how he has created an anchor space for college students on Main Street.

Slow Road begins its visit to Milledgeville, Ga., by interviewing Main Street Director Carlee Schulte.





Slow Road captures the glowing neon on the beautiful Campus Theatre marquee at sunset.

DAY 2

Afternoon: After a morning interview with developer Frank Pendergast at Baldwin Lofts to hear about his efforts to revitalize Milledgeville, we head over to the Campus Theatre where we interview Kyle Cullers, Vice President of Admissions at Georgia College. The theatre has arguably the most iconic façade on Main Street, and its beautiful neon glows on these early summer nights.

Evening: We grab food with Carlee at The Brick, one of the first restaurants to return to downtown Milledgeville. A little while later, First Friday takes over as shops spill out onto the sidewalks, creating a nexus of retail, arts, and entertainment.

DAY 3

We wrap up our final day of shooting by traveling to the Central State Hospital—an industry that used to define Milledgeville but now pales in comparison

to what is being accomplished on Main Street. After nearly 4,000 miles on the road over the past month, we head back home with memories of incredible people and places on our minds.

After great anticipation, the videos of the Great American Main Street Award communities were debuted at the National Main Streets Conference in Detroit on May 18, 2014.

REC

VIEW THE VIDEOS NOW

HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

WOODBINE, IOWA

MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA



2014 NATIONAL MAIN STREET AWARDS

THE ONES TO WATCH

MIDDLESBORO, KY

RAWLINS, WY

BY LINDA S. GLISSON

At the 2014 Main Streets Conference in Detroit, the National Main Street Center introduced a new awards category—the “Ones to Watch.” Two communities were chosen for their work on creative projects that have poised them on the edge of a major transformation. See why they were selected and how this year’s winners offer inspiration to both newly formed and long-established Main Street programs.



© DDM

View of Middlesboro's Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Home prior to the start of rehabilitation. DDM acquired the 27,000-sq.ft. building in December 2012. Cleanup and restoration efforts are now under way.

★ MIDDLESBORO, KENTUCKY

Middlesboro, Kentucky, has faced the dire conditions of a regional economy devastated by the coal industry collapse. Poverty levels in the area hover at 40 percent, accompanied by double-digit unemployment. Yet, in the last year alone, Middlesboro has added 100 new jobs and 13 businesses to its commercial district.

The richness of Middlesboro's natural setting in the Cumberland Mountains—it is the only city in America built inside a meteorite crater—and its historic architecture are major assets the city has used to improve and strengthen its

downtown. Nearly 10 blocks and more than 100 buildings in the Middlesboro Commercial District were listed in the National Register in the 1980s, followed by the creation of a local historic district a few years later.

In 2006, the local Main Street program, Discover Downtown Middlesboro, Inc. (DDM), was founded and has played a key role in preserving and invigorating the downtown ever since. Middlesboro is not only a “Designated Community” in the Kentucky Main Street program; it is also a Certified Local Government, which

gives it access to important preservation planning incentives.

Recognizing the importance its rich architectural heritage could play in revitalizing its historic commercial district, Middlesboro re-established its local historic commission, which is staffed by Discover Downtown Middlesboro, and secured grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Certified Local Government program to fund development of a preservation plan.

Today, the Middlesboro Preservation Plan is the first and only freestanding plan of its type in the state of Kentucky. To assist in preservation planning efforts, data on more than 250 buildings was collected through a cultural resource survey. In the past year alone, more than \$2.7 million was spent on 25 building projects, which

included a mix of rehabilitation, façade work, and new construction.

While these projects have helped strengthen downtown and attract new businesses, the vacancy rate is still greater than 15 percent. A strategic event to show what downtown could become seemed needed and it came in the form of the Better Block project.

In October 2013, more than a hundred volunteers worked over a 48-hour period to temporarily transform downtown. Entrepreneurship was the focus, says DDM Executive Director Isaac Kremer. “Pop-up shops transformed vacant stores into businesses. Mobile vendors on the sidewalks gave several local entrepreneurs an opportunity to test out business concepts.”

The Better Block event also advanced

historic preservation goals as volunteers worked to reopen the Park Theater, which had been closed for more than 30 years. Town residents flocked to a screening of *A Wonderful Life* in the newly cleaned and repainted theater. Plans are now under way to fully rehab and reopen the Park as an important performance venue downtown.

Paying homage to Middlesboro's history, a mural of Alexander Arthur, one of the city founders, adorns the side of a historic downtown building.





During Middlesboro's Better Block event in October 2013, volunteers worked to reopen the Park Theater, which had been closed for more than 30 years. Town residents enjoyed a screening of It's a Wonderful Life in the newly cleaned and repainted theater. Plans are under way to fully rehab and reopen the theater as a performance venue.

Middlesboro's Better Block event won the 2014 "Economic Development Project of the Year" award at the Kentucky Main Street Conference in January, but more importantly it showed residents and entrepreneurs the potential of the downtown. Private giving to DDM has soared, reaching its highest level in 2013, with more than \$1.2 million in grants are pending for 2014. And DDM's goals continue to grow

"Our work is far from done," says Kremer, reinforcing the point that Main Street districts are constantly evolving works in progress. "We will create 1,000 jobs in the next five years. Over time, we hope for

our work to become a regional and national model for preservation-led revitalization."

Kremer credits the Main Street Four Point Approach® with laying the foundation for Middlesboro's achievements: "It has shown us the benefits that come from a holistic approach to economic development. Creating places that people want to visit has a job creation and business development upside. Attracting resources to our area creates a sense of excitement and makes entrepreneurs feel welcome. This, in turn, creates an environment where businesses feel comfortable making investments downtown."

★ RAWLINS, WYOMING

Rawlins has long been a place where people come to visit and play. Founded in 1867, it was a “watering hole” for surveyors laying out the route of the first transcontinental railroad and it has a rich history as a stop along the railroad, reflected in its renovated historic train depot. But Rawlins is also gaining a reputation as a great place to work and live.

Building better businesses is a major goal of the Rawlins DDA/Main Street program. “Rawlins is the perfect place to enjoy your work and grow your business,” says Rawlins Main Street Director Pam Thayer. And the Rainbow Te-ton Entrepreneur Center (RTEC) is the perfect place to help entrepreneurs get started and succeed.

RTEC is the outgrowth of the Rawlins DDA/Main Street program’s first major preservation project, the rehabilitation of the Rainbow Teton Buildings, two historic structures that had fallen into disrepair. In 2008, Rawlins Main Street used a state grant of \$1.8 million to completely restore the two buildings and turn them into a multi-dimensional entrepreneur center in the heart of downtown.

RTEC allows startup, fledgling, and expanding businesses to work together and share expenses. The center “houses private, public, educational, and professional agencies that stimulate economic development, share information, and strengthen community partnerships,” says Thayer.

In addition to providing retail and office space, RTEC provides conference and training rooms, virtual office space, and monthly classes to retain businesses and encourage startups downtown.

Rawlins DDA/Main Street’s Economic Restructuring Committee oversees the facility, its tenants, and the GREAT program—Growing Rawlins Entrepreneurial Attitude and Talent. The GREAT program uses agencies housed at RTEC and financial incentives to recruit businesses and to foster entrepreneurial talent among students at the local high school.

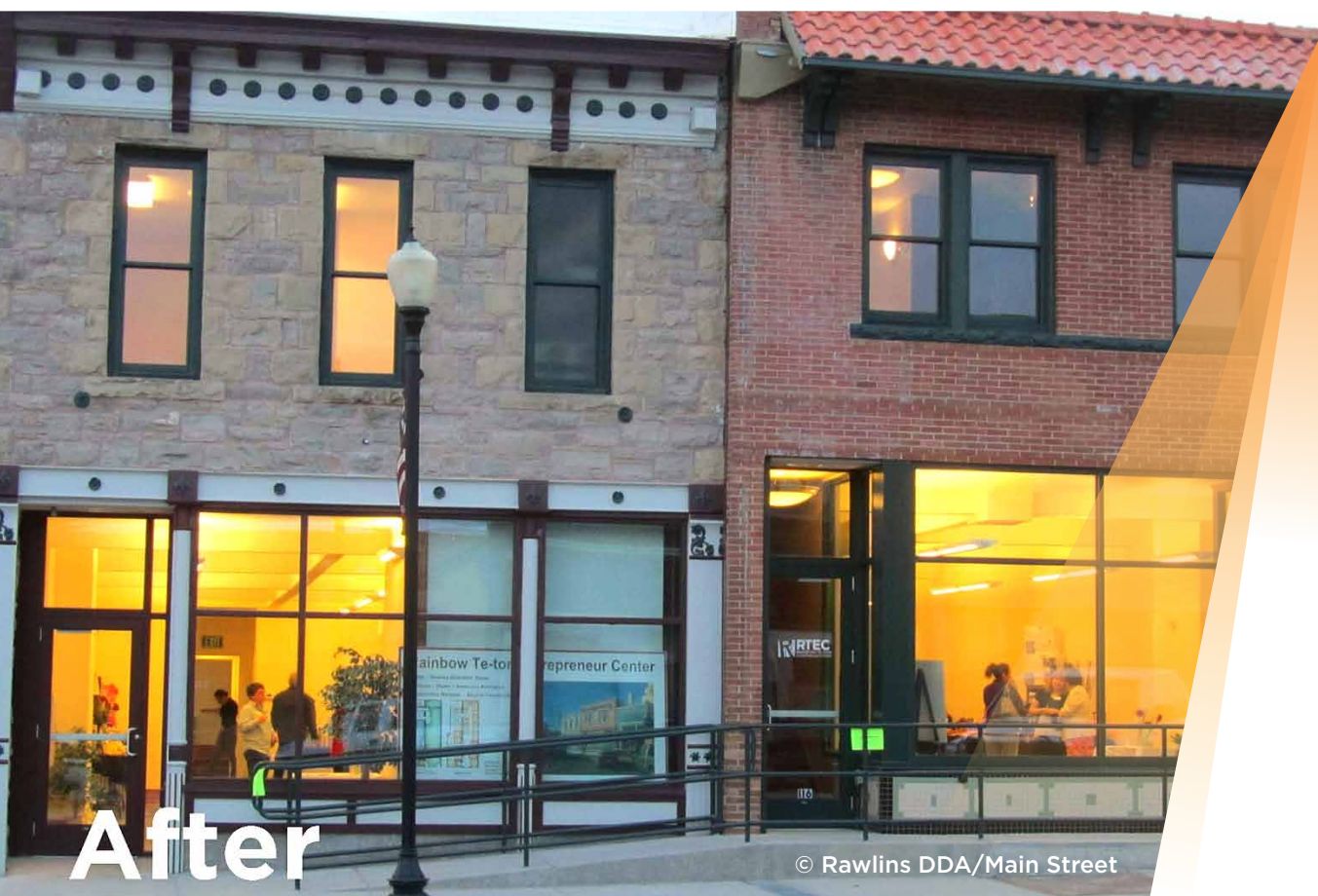
Main Street’s launch of RTEC and the entrepreneurial spirit it has created have had a dramatic impact on downtown, adding more than 175 jobs and 25 new businesses to the commercial district and winning Rawlins Main Street Director Thayer the U.S. Small Business Administration’s award as “2012 Small Business Champion.”

Downtown Rawlins is not only growing on the business front; it is taking major steps toward residential development. In 2011, the Rawlins City Council adopted a Downtown Master Plan developed by Rawlins DDA/Main Street to change municipal codes and zoning so mixed-use and residential projects could go forward.

Currently, the Main Street program is working on three major residential projects. The first will fill the upstairs of two connected historic buildings with at least 10 apartments. The buildings are



Rawlins Main Street used a \$1.8 million state grant to restore two deteriorating historic buildings (left) and turn them into the Rainbow Te-ton Entrepreneur Center (bottom), a launching pad for new businesses and a networking location for downtown merchants.



completely occupied at street level with retail and restaurants, a hair salon, and a coffee house.

“The owner appreciates all the work the Economic Restructuring and Design Committees have done to make this project happen,” says Thayer. “She has owned the properties for over 10 years and wasn’t able to rehabilitate the second story of either building.”

The second residential project is a duplex that will be leased as corporate housing, and the third is a multi-loft development. Downtown businesses, especially locally owned restaurants and bars “are excited about all of the

residential projects,” notes Thayer. “A successful and economically vibrant downtown needs mixed-use development. We are on the right path.”

The results bear that out. In 2006, the vacancy rates for available street-level properties was 45 percent; today it is at an all time low, less than 10 percent.

Thayer credits the Main Street Four Point Approach with putting Rawlins on the path to success. “We use the four-point approach as a ‘road map’,” says Thayer. “With all adventures, there come side trips or unexpected excursions, but we are able to use the approach to get ourselves back on course.★

Rawlins’ downtown offers a lively and friendly environment, with activities ranging from a Jam bike rally and Outhouse Races to a tour of the 12 downtown murals painted by local artists. In November 2010, Rawlins was selected as the only Wyoming city to have the honor of hosting the U.S. Capitol Christmas tree on a Friday night (below).

© Saratoga Sun





By Margie Johnson

RETAILING: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

ShopTalk is a continuing series of consumer-oriented retail articles by Margie Johnson, president of ShopTalk, 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.

It seems we are reinventing retailing once again! Is your small business adapting for these changes? The “blame” for the slump in retail sales growth is often “the economy/recessionary times, onset of the internet, the weather, etc.” Change is the constant in the world of retail today. The grim reality is that this change is not temporary. The environment in which all retailers (from the smallest to the giants) are operating is

marked with enormous shifts that greatly affect the way you must respond. It is vital that retailers embrace these changes and make them work for their businesses.

It is time for small business owners to recognize these shifts and “reposition” their operations to be more successful. Both in the past and the present, retail has been driven by a combination of four external factors:

- economic conditions,
- demographic changes,
- consumer behavior, and
- technological innovation.

As small and large businesses look to the future, they must understand that we truly are in the “midst of a seismic shift in the retail sector.” Thus, it’s imperative that all retailers “rethink their business plan/direction.” As a business coach, I often have to use some “tough love” strategies to convince business owners to successfully take the “obvious next steps” and adapt these strategies to their businesses.

To “*compete and succeed*,” retailers must challenge their current *value proposition*



(remember, this means *what the customer values!*). Frequently, I find that many business owners find this to be a difficult process to start. However, once they get started and redefine the store's role, the next steps become an asset and not a liability.

Over the past 20 years, I have had the opportunity to help the owners of many small businesses realign their core business values. These values gain new life as we rethink four powerful business mechanisms:

- consistency,
- alignment,
- transparency, and
- accountability.

The best, most effective, most profitable way to operate any retail business is to give everyone in the organization a voice to share their constructive thoughts. Team members should be kept advised of the company's financial goals—the team could possibly be rewarded for meeting or hopefully exceeding these goals. The key is to close the “communication gap” between store managers and employees. The “business of business” is essential! Regardless of the size of your staff, your volume, or your store, it is essential that you “rethink your business model.”

Small businesses that lack clear strategies may achieve some success in the short run, but as soon as competitive conditions stiffen or an unanticipated threat arises, they often “hit the wall” and sometimes fold. So, without a basis for differentiating themselves from the pack of similar competitors, the best a business can hope for is mediocrity in the marketplace.

In today's intensely competitive business world, storeowners who fail to think and act strategically are putting their businesses at risk. A business builds a competitive edge on its core competencies, which are a unique set of capabilities that a merchant develops in the following key operational areas:

- quality,
- service,
- innovation,
- team building,
- flexibility, and
- responsiveness.

Defining their competitive edge often allows business owners to vault past competitors.

Small businesses need a strategic, tactical planning process designed to address their specific needs. The strategic thinking process should be relatively short, somewhat informal, not too structured, and it should encourage the participation of all employees. Linking the purposeful action of strategic planning to any small business can produce extraordinary results that can shape a successful future!

Five Key Steps to Reposition Your Business

1. Develop a clear vision and translate it into a meaningful mission statement. Highly successful business owners can communicate their vision to those around them. The mission statement should answer the first question of any venture: What business are we in? This statement sets the tone for the entire business.

2. Assess the business's strengths and weaknesses. Strengths can include an inviting storefront that pulls customers in; extraordinary customer service; and an army of pleased customers that spread positive word-of-mouth advertising. Weaknesses might be limited capital to expand inventory, a poor reputation; no distinctive advantage over the store's competitors; and poorly planned marketing that fails to meet its objectives.
3. Scan the environment for significant threats and opportunities facing the business. Potential threats include changing shopping patterns of today's consumer; continued growth of online shopping; price wars among key competitors; and the store's location in an area that is trending downward. Among other opportunities, consider conducting a focus group to gain consumer insight about the business; adapt the use of technology to help grow the business; and create strong relationships with vendors to gain a competitive advantage.
4. Analyze the competition. Business owners should know their competitors' business almost as well as they know their own.
5. Translate strategic plans into action plans. **No strategic plan is complete until the owner puts it into action!**

The strategic planning process does not end with these five steps; rather it is an operating process that each business owner will need to revisit and repeat.

There is no question that retailing is being reinvented once again! History reinforces the fact that retailing is a dynamic industry—one that continually goes through dramatic transformations! I urge all business owners who read this article to consider ways to reinvent or improve their business strategies so they can differentiate their businesses and position them for a successful future. Business owners should seek to create a compelling strategy that will “pull” customers in, not “push” them away!

Wishing you much success as you “strategically examine” the retailing lessons of the past. Look forward and focus on strategies that are necessary to help your business remain relevant in this new retailing environment.

So, can you get started today?

Great retailing to you,
Margie Johnson

Margie Johnson can be reached at 757-491-1411, by e-mail at shoptalk@shoptalk.org, or by visiting her website, <http://www.shoptalk.org>.



My Main Street



National Main Street
Center

a subsidiary of the
National Trust for Historic Preservation

Artists at work in the Glasstown Arts District of
Millville, a New Jersey Main Street community.

© glasstownartsdistrict.com

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
My Main Street. Please make sure the image file is at least 8.5"x11"
at 150 dpi. Let your imagination run wild. We're looking for unusual,
artistic shots that capture the spirit of your Main Street District.