



2013 BEST MAIN STREETS

GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

BY ANDREA L. DONO

Each year, the National Main Street Center, Inc. recognizes the best and the brightest —Main Street communities that serve as an inspiration and model for commercial district revitalization throughout the nation. Each of our winners has proven that incremental progress—and persistence pays off, creating economic vitality, a unique sense of place, and a greater commitment to community by all. Here are the stories of this year's winners.

Common threads weave together the three 2013 Great American Main Street Award winners, which, on the surface, couldn't look more different from each other. Ocean Springs, Mississippi, is an artsy coastal town; H Street is a gritty urban neighborhood in

Washington, D.C.; and Rochester, Michigan, is a charming downtown suburb of Detroit.

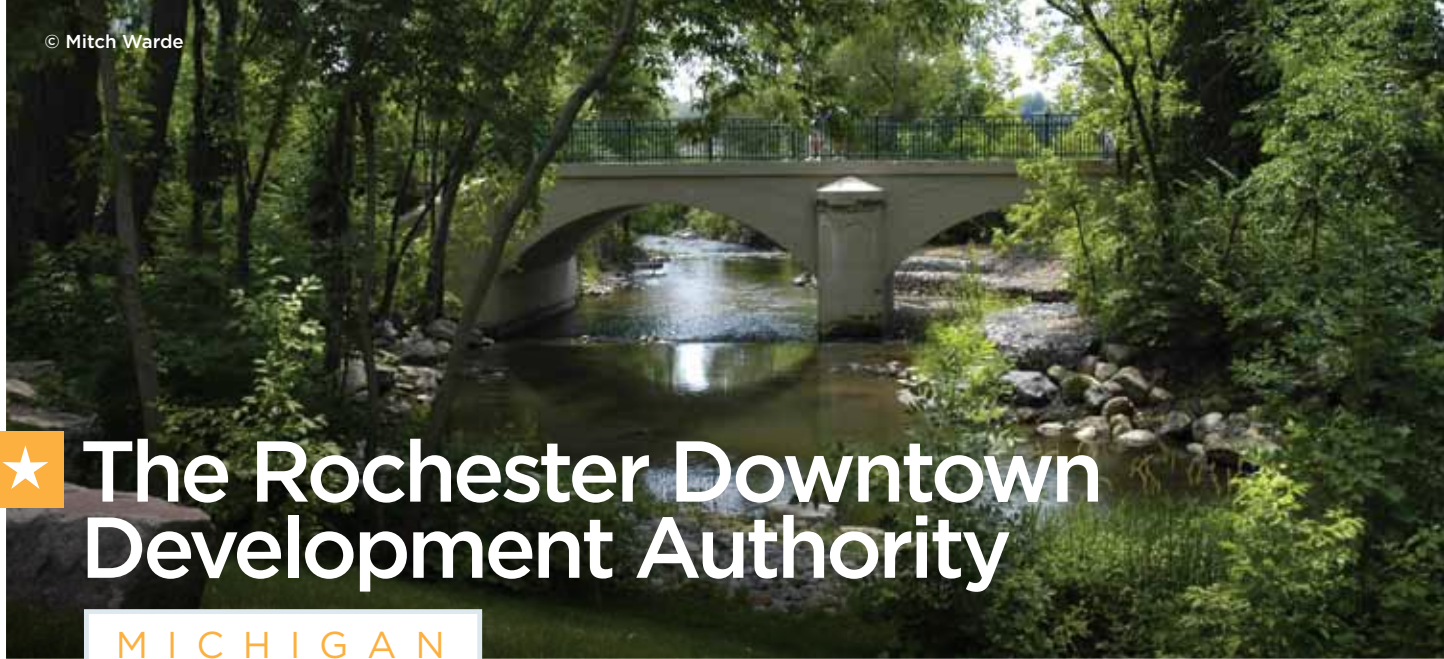
Each Main Street program has carved out a distinct reputation for itself. Ocean Springs Main Street leads its revitalization with strong events and has shown amazing resilience in its ability to overcome not one, but two major disasters. H Street is a model for applying the Main Street methodology to an urban environment in ways that not only have overcome high crime rates and the scars left by the 1968 riots, but have made its existing businesses the stars of the show, leading it to garner national attention for revitalizing an African American commercial business district. The Rochester Downtown Development Authority is known throughout the country for its spectacular Big Bright Light Show that has inspired many copy-cat efforts, as much as for its program's early adoption and leadership in using social media to promote Main Street.

While strikingly different from each other, these three communities have demonstrated that the true catalyst for reversing the cycle of disinvestment is to make local small businesses their highest priority. Their staggering successes also stem from identifying their assets, incorporating them into their identity, and

building an unwavering brand that infuses everything they do. And lastly, each organization is adapting the Main Street Approach® a little bit differently to meet their needs.



Built in 1849, the Rollin Sprague Building, commonly known as the Home Bakery, is the oldest commercial building in Rochester. With several different owners, the Home Bakery has been around since the 1930s.



The Rochester Downtown Development Authority

M I C H I G A N

SNAPSHOT:

- Community: *Suburban downtown*
- Nearest City: *Detroit*
- Size: *6 blocks*
- Population: *12,793*
- Operating Budget: *\$1.5 million (public funding 60%; private funding 40%)*
- Tax Status: *Governmental agency*

IMPACT:

- Business mix:
- Retail: *119*
- Restaurants: *41*
- Service businesses: *126*
- Offices: *125*
- Arts and entertainment: *6*
- Public reinvestment: *\$43.3 million*
- Private reinvestment: *\$53.6 million*
- Net new businesses: *132*
- Net new jobs: *2,352*
- Building rehabs: *46*
- New buildings: *12*
- Housing units added: *114*
- Vacancy rate when program began in 2000: *38%*
- Current vacancy rate: *4%*

Nestled along the Clinton River and Paint Creek, this Michigan community has a natural beauty accentuated by parks, trails, and distinctive historic charm. There are 350 shops, dining establishments, and service providers as well as a farmers market that make downtown *the* local shopping destination.

Once a hopping mill town with strong commerce, Rochester fell into decline in the 1970s when the mill economy was replaced by a mall economy. The retail vacancy rate hit 29 percent and office vacancies soared to 57 percent.

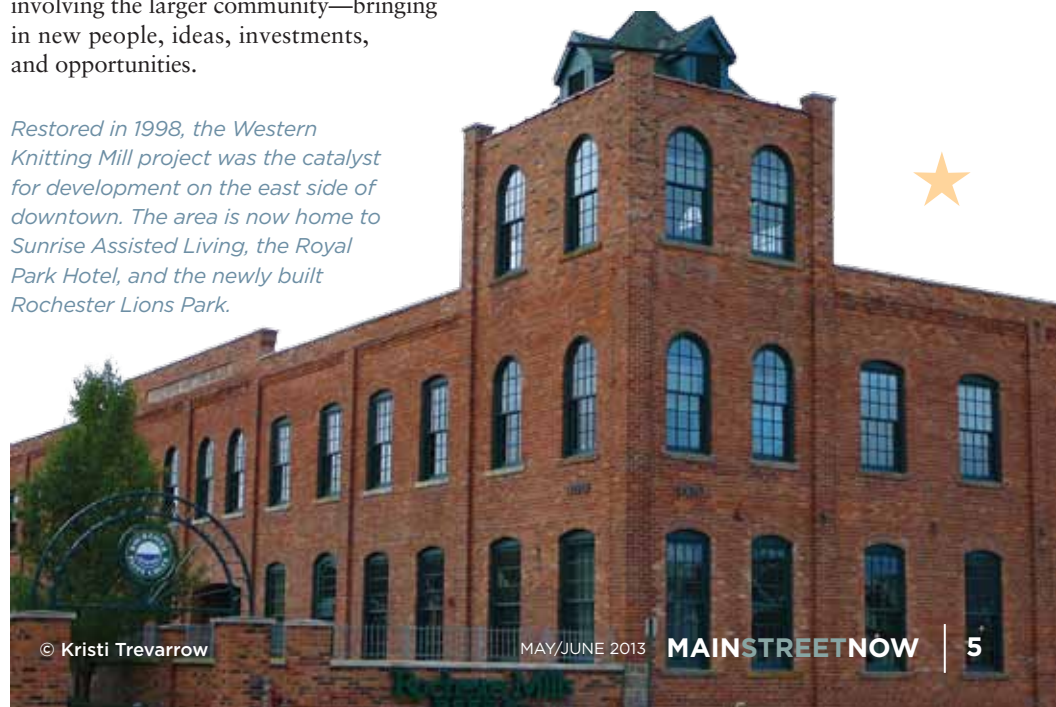
But the City of Rochester wasn't ready to give up. It decided to invest in downtown rather than abandoning it. In 1983, the city formed the Rochester Downtown Development Authority (DDA), giving the organization the job of making physical improvements and offering façade grants to whip the downtown's appearance into shape. The building rehabs and growing events calendar drew attention to the downtown. Within a few years, a strong cluster of restaurants lined the streets, which organically increased foot traffic and created an environment attractive to retailers.

Successes were adding up, but it wasn't until 2000, when Main Street Oakland County was established and the DDA adopted the Main Street Approach® that downtown took off. The district's revitalization no longer rested on the shoulders of a few board members and city officials; instead, the DDA gained a framework for involving the larger community—bringing in new people, ideas, investments, and opportunities.

The Rochester DDA undertook a \$500,000 rehabilitation project to restore the historic railroad bridge for use as a pedestrian bridge over Paint Creek to allow direct access from the Royal Park Hotel to the downtown.

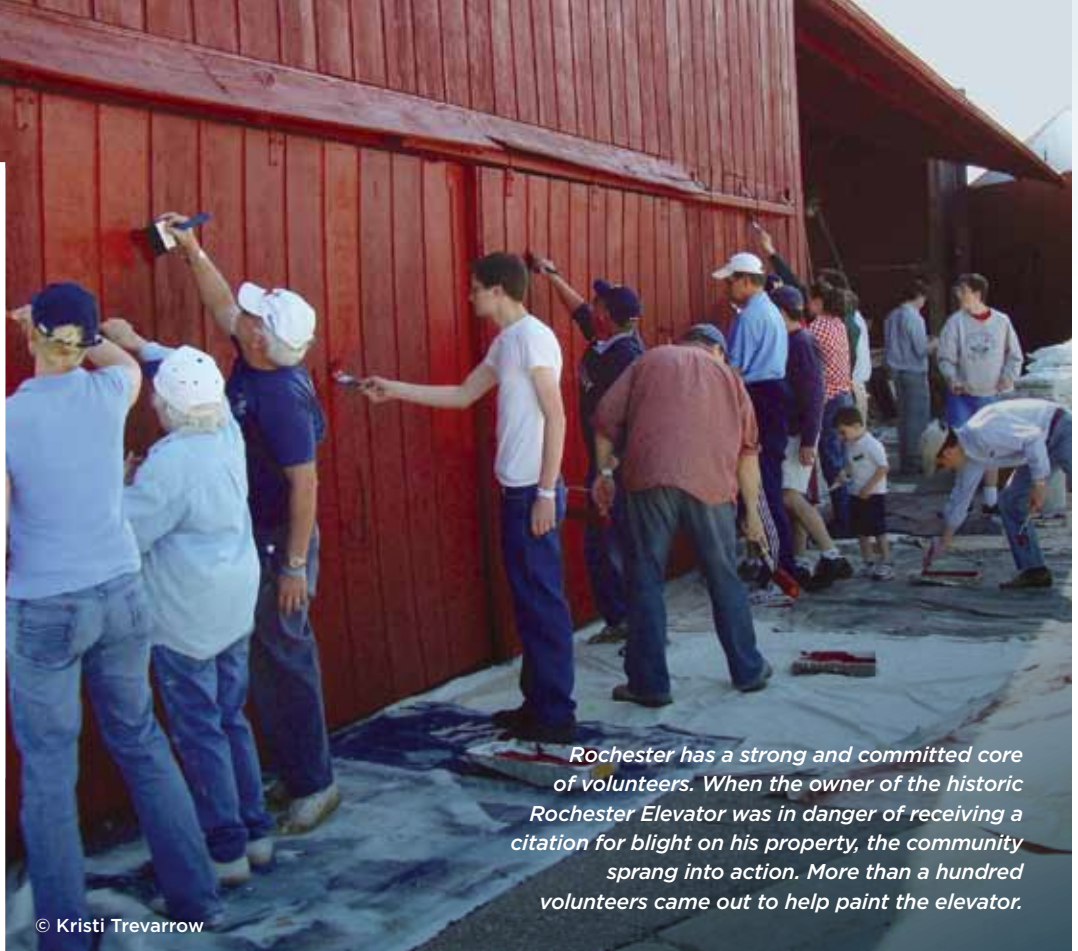
Each standing committee is staffed with seven to 19 volunteers—the number of members is determined by the work plan and scope of work. Volunteer engagement requirements are flexible and offer a variety of tasks and responsibility levels to fit the schedules and interests of those who want to be involved. The organization has secured diversified, sustainable funding through its Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) district, along with capital campaigns, a membership program, sponsorships, and grants. The DDA also established a Principal Shopping District (PSD) that levies a special assessment on property owners to fund downtown marketing.

Restored in 1998, the Western Knitting Mill project was the catalyst for development on the east side of downtown. The area is now home to Sunrise Assisted Living, the Royal Park Hotel, and the newly built Rochester Lions Park.





© Kristi Trevarrow



© Kristi Trevarrow

Rochester has a strong and committed core of volunteers. When the owner of the historic Rochester Elevator was in danger of receiving a citation for blight on his property, the community sprang into action. More than a hundred volunteers came out to help paint the elevator.

"Our organization is only as good as the volunteers who support us!" says DDA Director Kristi Trevarrow. "We host an annual Volunteer Appreciation Party and present our coveted Volunteer of the Year Award."

Enthusiastic participation comes from the business community, which makes up 60 percent of the organization's volunteers. Other board members and volunteers include residents, property owners, nonprofits, the chamber of commerce, developers and real estate professionals, and elected officials. Rochester cultivates its leaders through the committee structure, nurturing volunteers from the ground up and growing their responsibilities and knowledge base before appointing them to the board.

Cooperation among committees on joint projects and initiatives that reinforce each other's work helps break down organizational "silos." Each committee is chaired by a board member who shares updates at board meetings to build solid internal communication and opportunities for collaboration. For instance, the goal of creating a culture that supports small businesses is shared among all committees. The Business Development Committee will host workshops, gather market information, and develop incentives, while the Promotions Committee plans strategic marketing messages and supporting events.

Another example is a joint committee project that will bring a "Splash Pad" to an underused part of downtown. Land was donated to the DDA so it can build a free park featuring outdoor water sprinklers where

families can cool off during the summers. The Site Development (Design) Committee is handling site selection, engineering, design, and project estimates while the Organization Committee focuses on raising the funds necessary to make the project a reality. DDA Executive Director Kristi Trevarrow says that allowing two committees to work on the same project seems to be one of the best ways to let volunteers do what they are good at for the overall success of the project.

With a strong Main Street program at the helm, active and engaged volunteers, and a supportive city, Rochester today is a thriving suburb of Detroit, seeing a 20 percent increase in population in the last decade, according to the 2010 Census, when other municipalities were shrinking. To date, the revitalization effort has brought almost \$100 million in reinvestment to the downtown and plenty of new projects are on the way.

Building the Brand

Much of the DDA's energy focuses on opportunities for discovery. Events, social media, and image campaigns all highlight treasures you can find in this family-friendly small town, including food, history, and unique merchandise.

For visitors, a charming historic downtown awaits. They can enjoy gardens and trails along waterways for biking, walking, and

even cross-country skiing. They can also discover independent businesses, outdoor dining, and 100 days of events throughout the year. Of course, these amenities are attractive to local folks as well and contribute to their quality of life as well as a growing demand for housing. Two loft condominium infill projects are completely full and downtown's first apartment building is on the drawing board.

"Downtown Rochester has given my family a sense of community that is difficult to find in today's suburbia and vast shopping malls," says Thomas Wiggins, a local resident who moved his family from Chicago to Rochester after being impressed by the diversity of shops, people, and amenities.

When residents began requesting more eco-friendly options, the DDA formed a Green City Committee that responded with a downtown business recycling program, green living seminars at the farmers market, an electric car charging station, and more.

The DDA and its partners have been steadily making physical improvements to enhance the built environment and send the message that downtown is good for investment. Projects that include building a pocket park and extending the Paint Creek Trail to offer 8.5 miles of recreational space and a downtown river walk are results of effective public-private partnerships.

RIGHT: Even though everyone told us outdoor dining on Main Street would be impossible because we are on a state highway, says Trevarrow, the DDA and the city worked with the Michigan Department of Transportation to create outdoor dining opportunities for downtown businesses. This is a huge economic driver for downtown during the warmer months.

MIDDLE: When residents began requesting green-friendly technology, the city responded by putting electric car-charging stations in two locations downtown, using a grant from DTE Energy.

BOTTOM: Bikers, runners, and dog walkers alike enjoy the trail system that runs through downtown Rochester. In the foreground is Rotary Park, donated to the DDA by the Rochester Rotary Club.



© Mitch Warde



© Kristi Trevarrow



© Steve Kovacs



Aerial view of Main Street after the concrete was removed during the massive \$7.6 million streetscape project. During this phase of the “Main Street Makeover,” a three-block section of the street was closed for 65 days. To give pedestrians access to businesses, a six-foot sidewalk along Main Street was maintained at all times during construction.

© Kristi Trevarrow



During the streetscape construction, the Rochester DDA took the opportunity to celebrate the community's past. Historic finds, such as these vintage soda bottles, were put on display so residents could enjoy a glimpse into the past.

© Rochester DDA

“Main Street Makeover”

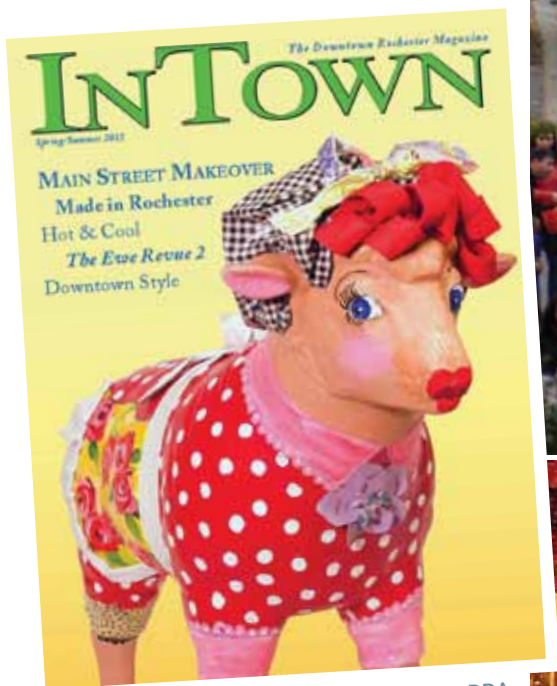
Downtown recently concluded a massive \$7.6 million streetscape overhaul, but the special twist was dubbing it the “Main Street Makeover,” which put a positive spin on several disruptive months. Parking was free, events continued, cash mobs showered businesses with attention, and social media sustained enthusiasm and promoted businesses and specials. As new water lines, pavement, LED streetlights, bike racks, traffic lights, and landscaping enhancements transformed Main Street, many businesses reported their strongest sales ever. In the next few years, the Makeover will expand to the rest of the downtown.

Excitement about the downtown’s new look was generated by finding things that are old. When the digging started, pieces of Rochester’s history were uncovered. The original brick street, an old burial ground, and a town well that were once buried were rediscovered. Horseshoes, bottles, buttons, newspaper ads, and other items were dusted off, then put on display and featured on Facebook. The DDA tried to keep everyone positive and looking forward to the changes. The original bricks were sold in a fundraiser that gave people a piece of their history.

“I was so positive that the recent seven months of construction would ensure Rochester's economic success that I took the risk of relocating The Funky Frog Children’s Resale Boutique to Main Street and expanding my business in the middle of construction,” says shop owner Renee Perkins. “After three and a half months in my new Main Street location, I am not disappointed! My business has grown.”

Upgrading the streetscape was a major design effort that helped reinforce the downtown’s image.

Perkins’s shop was among 12 businesses that opened during the construction (only four closed). As the Makeover was taking place, locals rallied to support their downtown and developed a deeper love for their community. Photos of milestones and completed parts of the project were celebrated along the way. Christine Walden Hughes, a downtown property owner, said it helped turn “Rochester fans into die-hards,” creating even stronger community bonds.



© Rochester DDA

In Town, Rochester's bi-annual downtown magazine, is mailed to 50,000 homes and offers a comprehensive listing of upcoming events, business openings, and seasonal activities, along with beautiful photos that showcase what customers can find downtown.

Marketing Rochester's Image

Upgrading the streetscape was a major design effort that helped reinforce downtown's image. The community brand is communicated through vigorous marketing efforts, too. Downtown Rochester has a strong social media presence—from Twitter to Facebook to Pinterest—that keeps its online community informed and excited about the community's progress, upcoming events, new businesses, and product highlights and specials from featured shops and cafes around town.

The DDA uses funds from the PSD to fuel a holiday television campaign; cooperative print and broadcast advertising program; and a twice-yearly, full-color magazine and business directory. The *In-Town Magazine* is mailed to 50,000 homes and is filled with upcoming events, business openings, seasonal produce at the farmers market, and tons of gorgeous photos showcasing what customers can find downtown—from the Almond Encrusted French Toast with Berry Compote at the Downtown Café to artistic salt and pepper shakers.

"The events calendar strikes a strong balance between image-raising activities and register-ringing events to provide a variety of



© Mitch Warde



© Brad Ziegler

Hosting 100 days of events a year, Rochester has "one of the finest promotions ... programs in the country," says Main Street Oakland County Coordinator Bob Donahue. *TOP:*The grand finale to Rochester's Halloween Celebration is a popular parade led by the Rochester fire and police departments. *ABOVE:* Launched in 2005, Rochester's signature event, the Big, Bright Light Show, has grown from 500,000 LED holiday lights to 1.5 million. The month-long display brings more than a million people to downtown Rochester, Michigan, each year.

participation opportunities that appeal to retailers, restaurants, and service businesses," says Trevarrow.

The DDA sends out an informational packet to business owners several times a year to share details about upcoming events. Businesses have numerous opportunities to get involved by volunteering, sponsoring, or advertising at events. As Elizabeth Aprea, owner of Moon River Soap Company, says, "The fact that all businesses are treated equal makes us feel respected."

The DDA works with partners to create activity such as Movies in the Moonlight, the Fire & Ice Festival, and the "Ewe Revue"—a series of Hollywood-themed public art in the form of sheep. But Rochester's signature event, the Big, Bright Light Show, takes center stage. A class act, this promotion was initially designed simply to increase holiday sales, but the 1.5 million lights draping the down-

town buildings has morphed into the largest holiday light display in the Midwest and now attracts a million visitors. Ablaze with holiday spirit, the street is filled with people who walk shoulder-to-shoulder to gaze at beautifully lit buildings and, more importantly, to pop into shops along the way.

This is placemaking at its finest: an event that is now in its seventh year builds community identity while also serving as one of the DDA's strongest business recruitment and retention tools. During its first year, the event generated a 29 percent increase in sales and businesses are still reporting a 15 percent bump.

"The [Rochester] DDA has developed one of, if not the, finest promotions and marketing programs in the country," says Bob Donahue, program coordinator of Main Street Oakland County. "Broad-based and creative, each year they outdo themselves. In fact, the DDA is a shining star in the state."



Supporting Business Development

Entrepreneurs choose Rochester because the DDA becomes their partner in building success. The Business Development Committee uses market demand to recruit new businesses, and DDA staff members take road trips with the city's economic development officer to other towns in search of businesses that might be interested in a second location.

Monthly events and quarterly professional development seminars help strengthen business skills and a variety of matching grants make improvements financially feasible. Some businesses like the Rochester Ballroom have specifically chosen to locate downtown because of the small-business support. The constant, cohesive marketing and strong brand make the downtown an attractive place for entrepreneurs.

A variety of grants are available for signs; lighting; and façade improvements, where priority is given to historic preservation projects. During the Makeover, rear entrance enhancement grants helped make alternative entrances functional and attractive for customer use.

Social media has always been a strength of the DDA and training local businesses on how to leverage those tools became a major priority.

"Once we dipped our toe in the Facebook pool, it became clear that we could use it effectively but our reach would be exponentially greater if we got our merchants involved," says Trevarrow. A Facebook workshop turned into "Facebook Fridays" where business owners could get one-on-one consultations.

"After that initial campaign, 35 businesses began actively using the social media tool. Four years later, our Facebook Fridays help businesses develop their overall social media strategies and include using Twitter and Pinterest," says Trevarrow. "More than a

hundred of our businesses are now actively using social media."

When the new owner of The Funky Frog bought the struggling business a few years ago, she was trying to get it back on track with only a shoestring budget. Because her resale shop sold one-of-a-kind items, print advertising risked promoting goods that might be sold before the ad hit. The DDA coached her in using Facebook to post photos of new arrivals and take requests from customers to hold items. The strategy turned out to be so successful that she has turned the business around and even hired staff.

Along those lines, the Business Makeover Program, the DDA's newest initiative, channels attention, assistance, and resources

door for new development. The DDA has acquired several parcels of land, which it has been using as parking lots while it works with developers to identify mixed-use projects that will fit the downtown and continue to move the community and its vision forward.

A Model Main Street

Main Street communities, inside Michigan and beyond, have been looking to the Rochester DDA and Trevarrow for years. Trevarrow demonstrates leadership for the entire Main Street network and has generously shared her lessons learned, insights, and triumphs in conference sessions, a continuing column in *Main Street Now*, and

The intangible changes in Rochester—its improved quality of life and heightened pride in downtown—are met with the visible successes that have spread through the community and beyond.

to "at-risk" businesses to help them before they are forced to close.

Trevarrow says that even if she doesn't hear a rumor that a business is closing, it's pretty easy to see the signs. "They stop coming to meetings, no longer participate in events, don't change their window displays, don't order new merchandise," she says. "I approach a business and ask how it is doing and get a feel for the issues and how we can help. I'd rather have that hard conversation than lose a business without an opportunity to offer assistance."

The work of the DDA is paying off: the downtown has a 4 percent vacancy rate and boasts more than 2,300 net new jobs and 132 net new businesses. As success mounts, demand for additional downtown housing and retail is increasing, which is opening the

through her blog. She embodies the spirit that we are all in this together and when all Main Streets throughout the nation improve, everyone benefits.

The intangible changes in Rochester—its improved quality of life and heightened pride in downtown has become a Michigan success story—are met with the visible successes that spread through the community and beyond.

"Today's Downtown Rochester is a picture-perfect district that has held onto its heritage and prepared for the future," says Hughes. "I have always been proud to own a building here, but now I am secure in my ownership and happy to know that my investment is on solid ground. Best of all, the place where I meet my friends, raised my children, live my life—my hometown—is thriving."

The Rochester DDA works with businesses to ensure their success, offering professional development seminars and a variety of matching grants. Thanks to the DDA's recruitment and marketing efforts, the downtown attracts shoppers of all ages.



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★ Ocean Springs Main Street

MISSISSIPPI

SNAPSHOT:

Community: Rural downtown
Nearest city: New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama
Size: 100 blocks
Population: 17,472
Operating budget: \$300,000 (public funding 30%, private funding 70%)
Tax status: 501(c)6

IMPACT:

Business mix:
Retail: 109
Restaurants: 36
Service businesses: 26
Offices: 47
Arts and entertainment: 42
Public reinvestment: \$407 million
Private reinvestment: \$116 million
Net new businesses: 319
Net new jobs: 1216
Building rehabs: 196
New buildings: 23
Housing units added: 320
Vacancy rate when program began in 1990: 80%
Current vacancy rate: 0%

The coastal town of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, may be off the beaten path, but it has become known as a culinary destination with an artsy vibe and nonstop events. Block after block, a canopy of majestic 300-year-old oak trees shades attractions like sculptures and murals, art galleries, arts and craft shops, ethnic restaurants, and churches dating back to the 1800s.

Throughout the year, tourists and locals enjoy the town’s charms, cottage-style shops, and pathways peppered with public art connecting to the sandy shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Lovelace Drug’s neon sign glows outside, beckoning people to order a milkshake at the same soda fountain counter where Elvis Presley once sat. The Tato-Nut Donut shop, where the specialty treat is made with potato flour, has been family-owned and operated since the 1960s. It’s no wonder Ocean Springs has been named one of the 50 Best Small Towns in America and profiled as a hot travel destination by the *Washington Post* and *Southern Living* magazine.

The vibrancy of downtown Ocean Springs today makes it hard to imagine that it once was a ghost town. The community’s long history dates back to its founding in 1699 as

a French Louisiana outpost. But over time, it was forgotten. In the 1980s, the population hovered around 2,000 and the vacancy rate hit 80 percent. The economy was stagnating when the Main Street program began in 1990. Slow and steady change took place, with each new business that opened and each new bench added to the street.

The Main Street program was originally housed in city government but found that wasn’t a perfect fit. The program then shifted to the Chamber of Commerce/Tourism Bureau and now all three entities use the Main Street Four-Point Approach® as the overarching community development strategy.

“Financially, each organization could not exist separately nor be successful. In a small town this structure is beneficial,” says Cynthia Sutton, events coordinator/public relations manager for the Ocean Springs Chamber-Main



© Ben Muldrow

Tato-nut doughnuts, where the tasty treat is made with potato flour, is one of the two original businesses that were in the district when Ocean Springs Main Street began in 1990.



Street-Tourism Bureau. “We have one staff, one board, and one budget that all incorporate the ‘four points.’ It’s part of everything we do all around town.”

The organization has four standing committees and rotating task forces that carry out the work planned during annual board retreats. The volunteer work is supported by strong involvement and leadership from paid staff who say they run the revitalization program like a business. Its leaders believe that its organizational model helps break down “silos” that could result from the traditional Main Street committee structure. Members of the Main Street program believe events are the “gateway” for engaging volunteers and the hook that captures people’s interest.

Branding through the Arts

Events are also the organization’s strategy for building its brand. This “beach-y” Southern tourism destination and seafood mecca has a strong, cohesive brand built around the arts.

More than 30 years ago, Ocean Springs launched the Peter Anderson Arts & Crafts Festival to celebrate the artist who opened a

master pottery business in the community back in the 1920s. What began as a few vendors in a parking lot has grown each year in size, activity, and attendance. Today, the festival draws more than 120,000 people from several states and fills two days with arts, music, and food. The festival has set high standards for the vendors and artists selected for its juried art show.

With a year-round staff member dedicated to managing the festival and close attention to high quality, this community event has grown into the region’s premier festival and received many state awards. A recent economic impact study drives home the impact the festival has had on the local economy (see “Measuring the Economic Impact of Special Events,” in the May/June 2012 issue of *Main Street Now*.) The study found that the event brings \$22 million to the area. The Main Street program used this data to show the power of Main Street and its events and, in the process, landed a major sponsor—Blue Moon Brewing Company—which has been a boon to the Ocean Springs Chamber-Main Street-Tourism Bureau fund raising, too.

As the festival grew, more events were added to the calendar, turning August into “festival season.” The visibility these events bring to downtown has piqued the interest of entrepreneurs, so much so, that the

downtown has a zero-percent vacancy.

More than a hundred restaurants have opened in Ocean Springs, with a cluster of 32 in the downtown alone. The town’s restaurants generate more than \$1 million in revenue each year. Some readers might recognize the name “Shed Barbeque and Blues Joint.” It has been featured on The Food Network’s *Diners Drive-Ins and Dives* show and on *Live! With Regis and Kelly*, among other outlets. The Food Network has been visiting other Ocean Springs establishments lately, too.

Ocean Springs Main Street has been leveraging downtown’s reputation as a major foodie destination by adding food-focused festivals like the Taste of Ocean Springs; the Red, White & Blueberry Festival; and Feast of Flavors that celebrates seasonal fall foods. The program soon will be revamping a website devoted to Ocean Springs’ culinary niche to build its online marketing efforts.

Everywhere you look downtown, you see the arts. Creativity is in the air and in the stores. Enticed by the Peter Anderson Festival and the concentration of artists living in Ocean Springs, artists come here to open up studios and shops. From blown glass to handmade housewares to fine art, an arts enthusiast can find lots of one-of-a-kind treasures.



© Cynthia Sutton

LEFT: Ocean Springs has become a major foodie destination, with a cluster of more than 30 restaurants downtown. The Government Street Grocery Restaurant was one of the first to open.

BELOW: Visitors to Lovelace Drugs can treat themselves to a milkshake at the store’s original soda fountain where Elvis Presley used to hang out when he summured in Ocean Springs.



© Ben Muldrow

Public art is pervasive, too. Public Art in Ocean Springs is a joint effort involving the Ocean Springs Chamber of Commerce, Historic Ocean Springs Association, the city, and the Jackson County Supervisors. Together they are placing works by nationally prominent sculptors throughout the town and will unveil their fifth installment this year.

Art even turns up on bridges leading to the community. The Biloxi Bay Bridge was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Partners worked with the Mississippi Department of Transportation to rebuild

it—but now it includes 12-foot-wide walking and biking paths and locally made bronze plaques designed by area artists placed every tenth of a mile. In 2008, the concrete walls beneath the bridge were adorned with a mosaic mural, also designed by an area artist.

Boosting the Local Economy

Investments made in infrastructure, historic buildings, and local businesses are vitally important to building the downtown's economy and protecting its heritage.

Events are Ocean Springs Main Street's strategy for building its brand. This "beach-y" Southern tourism destination and seafood mecca has a strong, cohesive brand built around the arts.



© Cynthia Sutton

ABOVE and BELOW: The Peter Anderson Arts & Crafts Festival brings more than 120,000 visitors to this community of 17,000 each year, and generates more than 30 million dollars in tax revenues. The festival sets high standards for its vendors and for the artists selected for its juried art show.

One such investment—rehabbing the 1927 historic high school—has had a huge impact on the downtown. Although it became a Mississippi Landmark in 1998 and was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1999, the school had been dormant and was slated for demolition. The roof had been badly damaged during Hurricane Katrina, but the community wasn't ready to see it go.

Ocean Springs Main Street took the first step by getting it listed on the state's most endangered list and building momentum for its rebirth. The Friends of the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center of Arts and Education helped oversee the major renovation. Funds were pulled together from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the Mississippi Arts Commission,

the Jackson County Board of Supervisors, and the City of Ocean Springs as well as from local residents and organizations. The overwhelming support saved a landmark that reopened as a downtown cultural center, known as "The Mary C.," for short. The center supports the visual and performing arts, music, and culinary arts by providing classes and performing space.

What had once been a depressed section of Government Street has turned into an area of opportunity anchored by the Mary C. Its executive director points out that a void in this part of downtown has been filled.

"This once-depressed section has become a vibrant area where visitors and residents ride their bikes, walking is commonplace, and restaurants and retailers attract shoppers and diners from all over the region," says Bryant G Whelan, the center's executive director. "In one week alone, more than a thousand school children tromped through the same halls their parents roamed when they were in school. It would be hard to imagine the Ocean Springs community and how it might look without the Mary C. If Ocean Springs Main Street had not taken the first and important step of saving our building from demolition, this dream would not have become a reality."

Recovering from Disaster

Ocean Springs Main Street also played a pivotal role in the community's recovery from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. All of the downtown business owners lost their homes and were living in their businesses. The downtown mostly held up from the wind and rain but it was without power, telephone service, or water.

Ocean Springs Main Street became the



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ABOVE: Using an economic impact study that showed the revenue-generating power of Main Street and its events, Ocean Springs landed a major sponsor, Blue Moon Brewing Company, for the Peter Anderson Festival.



Public art is pervasive throughout the downtown. Ocean Springs Main Street is spearheading a multi-year public art project: 24 spaces have been reserved and 10 original pieces have already been placed in the district.

© Ben Muldrow



Ocean Springs has been leveraging its reputation as a major culinary tourism destination by adding "foodie" festivals, such as the Red, White & Blueberry Festival, which is held each year on the weekend closest to the Fourth of July.

© Cynthia Sutton

Everywhere you look downtown, you see the arts. Creativity is in the air, on the streets, and in the stores, bringing artists to Ocean Springs to set up shop and enticing visitors looking for one-of-a-kind treasures, from handmade housewares to fine art.



Local artist Stig Marccuson spends time with his children as he draws in downtown Ocean Springs. This is a common scene in the district, which attracts many artists who come to the community to open shops and studios.

© Cynthia Sutton



© Ben Muldrow

Renovation of the 1927 high school, a Mississippi and National Register landmark, was the first big "win" for Ocean Springs Main Street. The building now houses the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center, which supports the visual, performing, and culinary arts.



© Cynthia Sutton

Reinforcing Ocean Springs as a major destination for those interested not only in enjoying but also learning the culinary arts is the Viking cooking school, located downtown in the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center.



With shops like the Hillyer House art gallery (above), which relocated to Ocean Springs after Hurricane Katrina, it's no wonder the town has been named one of the 50 Best Small Towns in America and profiled as a hot travel destination by the Washington Post and Southern Living.

clearinghouse for information and a symbol of hope. The organization's strong track record of leadership gave it an important voice in informing the recovery and guiding downtown construction. Main Street led strong advocacy efforts to earmark federal Community Development Block Grant recovery funds not just for its downtown, but for all Gulf Coast towns. Margaret Miller, the Main Street manager, joined others to lobby hard for historic downtowns to be recognized and supported.

A resilient attitude and state and federal money, along with support from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and caring Main Street programs throughout the nation, helped the community bounce back. Recovery money was channeled into façade improvement grants and streetscape enhancements that helped Ocean Springs emerge even stronger.

Ocean Springs Main Street administered a façade grant of more than \$20,000 to help about a dozen small business owners make improvements to their facades, landscaping, awnings, and signs. Many restaurateurs used the funds to build outdoor dining patios. The recovery effort after Hurricane Katrina eventually led to more than \$10 million in public and private investment and the opening of 30 new restaurants—many of which

contribute to the patio dining atmosphere.

Business owners from other communities have discovered new opportunities in Ocean Springs and relocated there. One success story involves downtown's very own "white elephant" building—a 1930s hardware store vacant since 1960—and business owners from Pass Christian, Mississippi. For years they had been courted to open a second location in Ocean Springs.

"After Hurricane Katrina, our home and business in Pass Christian were completely wiped away, along with virtually everything else in town," says Paige Riley, owner of the Hillyer House art gallery and gift shop. "As we looked to rebuild, the decision to relocate to Ocean Springs was one of the easiest we made. We opened the weekend of the Peter Anderson Festival ... and in the seven years since that weekend, we have never looked back. The entire community welcomed us with open arms and has continued to show that support over the years."

The downtown streetscape received an influx of investment and improvements during a two-year, \$4.6 million streetscape project. Utilities were buried, new streetlights and wayfinding signs were installed, drainage was improved, and sidewalks were made more pedestrian friendly and accessible for

people with disabilities.

But just as Ocean Springs was bouncing back, the BP Oil Spill made news. Media portrayed coastal towns as closed and Main Street jumped into action to counter those claims and show the nation that tourism in the community was alive and well and that Ocean Springs was open for business.

Ocean Springs Main Street supported businesses by sending out weekly emails with updates and assistance information. Its newsletter offered money-saving tips, and its ongoing surveys measured how businesses were affected by the oil spill. But most of all, Main Street heavily promoted its summer festivals and told people it was safe to visit.

From Ghost Town to Tourist Mecca

This small town has seen a staggering amount of investment—\$407 million in public investment and \$116 million in private monies. In the last year alone there have been nine business expansions, and a host of exciting projects are coming up, including a boutique hotel opening near the Mary C and new infill that will include 12 restaurants and new retail space. Charter Bank, a small community institution, is building a \$3 million branch this year.



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TOP LEFT: Downtown has become a prime location for housing as Ocean Springs has grown from a sleepy village of 2,000 to a bustling town of 17,000. One of the newest housing developments was created from Katrina cottages and offers one to three bedroom units.

TOP RIGHT: Downtown Ocean Springs hosts a wide variety of arts-related businesses, arts programming at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center, cultural events, and public art, all of which reinforce the community's authentic brand.

RIGHT: At the end of the day, Ocean Springs is not only a great arts town, it's a relaxing vacation spot as well. The beach is an easy walk from the center of downtown, just right for a pleasant afternoon rest after a day of local shopping!



© Ben Muldrow



What once was a sleepy village of 2,000 has grown into a bustling town that is now home to 17,000 people. Upper-floor housing, new infill, and single-family bungalows offer a variety of living options with more than 300 housing units added since the Main Street program has been in action.

"The downtown has attracted hundreds of residents, which has been a catalyst for residential development," says Mark P. Loughman, director of environmental affairs and resource strategy for Mississippi Power. "Until a few years ago, we had never had any of our company executives living in Ocean Springs. Today our company

president and several other executives who could live anywhere along the Mississippi Gulf Coast have made their homes in Ocean Springs."

Cultural tourism has been at the heart and soul of the revitalization of Ocean Springs. The arts economy flourishes in this downtown and the wide variety of arts-related businesses, cultural events, arts programming at the Mary C and public art all reinforce the community's authentic brand.

The town has been so successful, in fact, that Miller was recently recognized by the Mississippi Tourism Association with a Tourism Hall of Fame Award. Accolades come

from partners and local business owners who agree that Miller and her colleagues are the driving force behind the community's success.

"This program has demonstrated time and again its commitment to a long-term downtown revitalization effort in conjunction with strong public-private partnerships and the leadership needed to ensure a viable downtown revitalization effort," says Bob Wilson, executive director of the Mississippi Main Street Association. From ghost town to a travel destination, Ocean Springs shows that perseverance can help downtown weather any storm and emerge stronger than before.



★ H Street Main Street

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SNAPSHOT:

Community: Urban neighborhood

Size: 22 blocks

City population: 601,723
(entire District of Columbia)

Operating budget: \$400,000 (public funding 50%; private funding 50%)

Tax status: 501(c)3

IMPACT:

Business mix:

Retail: 34

Restaurants: 64

Service businesses: 82

Offices: 42

Arts and entertainment: 12

Public reinvestment: \$97 million

Private reinvestment: \$43.4 million

Net new businesses: 140

Net new jobs: 1,579

Building rehabs: 189

New buildings: 6

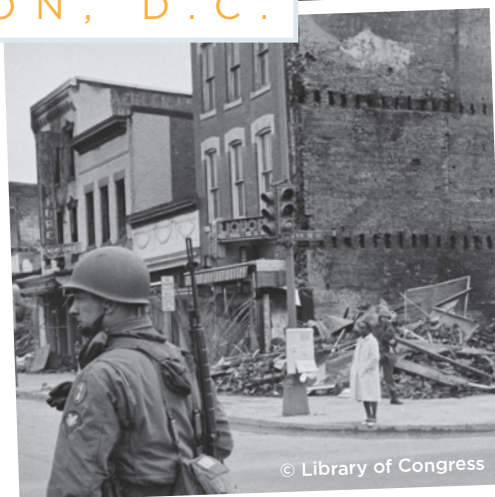
Housing units added: 1,332

Vacancy rate when program began in 2002: 30%

Current vacancy rate: 10%

H Street appeared on the radar screens of many Washingtonians with the revival of the 1938 Atlas Theater. Shuttered for years and masked by a patina of graffiti, the icon's marquee was relit in 2005 and the theater's reopening was a sign that H Street's time had come. But the story behind H Street's revival transcends a single project; rather, the community's heritage has been its catalyst.

H Street, historically an African-American community, welcomed shoppers and entrepreneurs excluded from other neighborhoods



during segregation. Residents built a community based on tolerance. The doors of the Atlas were open to individuals of any color and diverse residents of all ethnicities joined together in trying to integrate their schools.

But the harmony of the neighborhood was disrupted in the 1960s. Abandonment as families headed to the suburbs and the violent riots of 1968 that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., saw the community dragged down into a period of high crime and urban decay. Any change that greeted the street was through demolition.

In the mid-1990s, however, a renewed interest in urban living brought in pioneering new residents who fixed up the homes. An active business group, the H Street Merchants and Professionals Association, was building momentum, and community members were gathering in each other's homes to discuss possibilities for the area's revival. The DC Office of Planning gave shape to those informal conversations through a community visioning effort, which became the mission of the newly established H Street Main Street (HSMS) program in 2002.

HSMS has charted new territory in urban revitalization by finding a way to engage



TOP LEFT and ABOVE: Shuttered for years, the 1938 Atlas Theater was rehabbed in 2003 and now houses resident theatrical and dance companies. The theater also hosts many touring shows and locally-produced shows. Today, the Atlas is used almost every night with a full schedule of resident and touring productions. On Saturday mornings, neighborhood children take ballet lessons at the Joy of Motion Dance Studio.

MIDDLE: In 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., riots erupted throughout the H Street area and the neighborhood suffered abandonment and decay as residents and businesses fled to the suburbs.

volunteers to carry out its work. Standing committees have been replaced by various ad hoc committees dedicated to specific projects. For example, the H Street Festival Committee has 20 volunteers who help produce the signature event, and the Communications Committee keeps the website updated and the Twitter account tweeting. Interested in engaging youth and tech-savvy professionals, Main Street developed a flexible volunteer structure more conducive to participation and retention. Virtual meetings supplement group meetings, and volunteers assume responsibilities for completing entire projects, which they can add to their resumes.

"Our bold dream of a localized, self-sufficient community was born on a fire-charred street where empty buildings and cracked



© Rappaport Co.

A renewed interest in urban living in the 1990s brought pioneering residents who fixed up homes in the H Street district, and an active business and professional group began discussing a vision for the area's revival, which became the mission of H Street Main Street when it was established in 2002.



© DDOTDC

H Street Main Street's dream of a thriving, self-sufficient community has been realized over the past decade as entrepreneurs and developers reclaimed 300,000 square feet, reducing the vacancy rate from 30 to 10 percent. More than 140 businesses have opened, bringing with them more than 1,500 new jobs.

sidewalks had loomed for a lifetime," says Anwar Saleem, executive director of HSMS. That dream is being realized as entrepreneurs and developers have reclaimed 300,000 square feet in the last 10 years, reducing the vacancy rate from 30 to 10 percent. One hundred and forty businesses have opened, bringing with them more than 1,500 new jobs.

What was once a thriving commercial district gave way to liquor stores before being taken over by beauty salons. More recently, a wave of new bars, nightclubs, and restaurants have filled some vacancies, causing H Street Main Street to face the need to balance retail with entertainment use and new entrepreneurs with established business owners.

Around the time the Atlas reopened, the community worked with the city to establish an overlay district that promoted density, upper-floor reuse, rehabilitation of existing buildings, and compatible design sensitive to the area's historic character. The corridor is divided into three sections: a housing cluster, neighborhood-serving retail, and arts and entertainment businesses.

Building the Brand

From the beginning, H Street Main Street identified its strongest assets as its history, its historic charm and pedestrian scale, its multicultural and multiracial demographics, and its local businesses—specifically its niche as a corridor filled with African American-owned businesses. Before the influx of new residents and entrepreneurs, conversations were already taking place about gentrification and awareness of that issue was high.

Preserving the community's aesthetics is being achieved largely through outreach and education, one-on-one conversations with neighborhood stakeholders, and fund

raising to seed façade and sign improvements. The results: H Street Community Development Corporation, which had demolished several blocks of the corridor for infill and office buildings, no longer promotes aggressive demolition and has become a strong partner of HSMS. Property and business owners are also enthusiastic about making building improvements.

In 2007, the Main Street program created a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district that generates \$100,000 to fund grants to business owners, while three other funding sources contribute to a façade grant program. Only one source requires a matching contribution, and depending on need, HSMS will work with small business owners to find other resources to help cover the match.

Small business owners are using this money to spruce up their buildings from the inside-out. They've improved their façades, signs, lighting, and merchandising; and they have removed their roll-down security grates, sending a strong signal to the neighborhood that the district's not only strong and thriving but that it is safe as well.

"Security grates don't belong in a community six blocks from the nation's Capitol," says Saleem, who educates business owners on the importance of good design and finding security alternatives. "Grates don't really provide much security; if someone really wants to get into your building, they'll find a way."



© H Street Main Street

Carolyn Thomas shows off some of the clothing she sells in her new location. In 2008, Carolyn opened a women's clothing store four blocks away from this shop. She moved to a larger storefront with a larger display window this year. H Street Main Street provided a no-interest loan through a partnership with Washington Area Community Investment Fund and \$85,000 in grant funding so Carolyn could rehabilitate the new store.

He encourages businesses owners to remove their grates or use ones that occlude less than 20 percent of the storefront so they can still showcase the building and business when closed. Applicants who propose removing grates are given a higher priority when applying for grants.

An important complement to the business makeovers is the improved look of the street. HSMS was awarded a \$100,000 two-year matching grant from the DC Department of Transportation to create and run the H Street Clean Team. In collaboration with

names printed on the banners for a year of advertising, and the cost was based on a sliding scale to give small businesses a shot at claiming visibility.

Advertisements on busses, bus shelters, and local newspapers reflect the neighborhood image, promoting the wide variety of things to see, do, buy, eat, and drink at H Street establishments. Local media talk shows and newspaper articles have been following H Street's success and progress over the years, garnering much local and

From the beginning, H Street Main Street identified its strongest assets as its history, its historic charm, its pedestrian scale, its multicultural population, and its local businesses.

the Gospel Rescue Ministry/Ready to Work program, clean and safe "ambassadors" work five days a week to keep up appearances and add a presence on the street that encourages greater tourism and retail foot traffic. Corporate and local business partners and sponsors contributed funds to help HSMS match the grant.

It is important to HSMS that the district be more than a bar scene, so it reflects its other amenities, supported by the three overlay district sections, in its branding. Lining H Street are 47 streetlamp banners that promote the "Central Retail District," "Urban Living District," and the "Arts & Entertainment District." Businesses were invited to get their

national media attention for the program and the district's evolution.

In 2012, *USA Today* named the corridor one of "10 Great Places to Explore Urban Neighborhoods" and *Forbes* magazine listed H Street as number six on its list of "America's Hippest Neighborhoods." After the *Forbes* announcement, Miles Gray, managing partner at Smith Commons Dining Room & Public House, said his establishment "felt an immediate wave of new business and publicity," and a short while later, President Obama hosted his last campaign dinner there.

"This type of press is a frequent occurrence, largely due to the amount of time and organization that H Street Main Street has put



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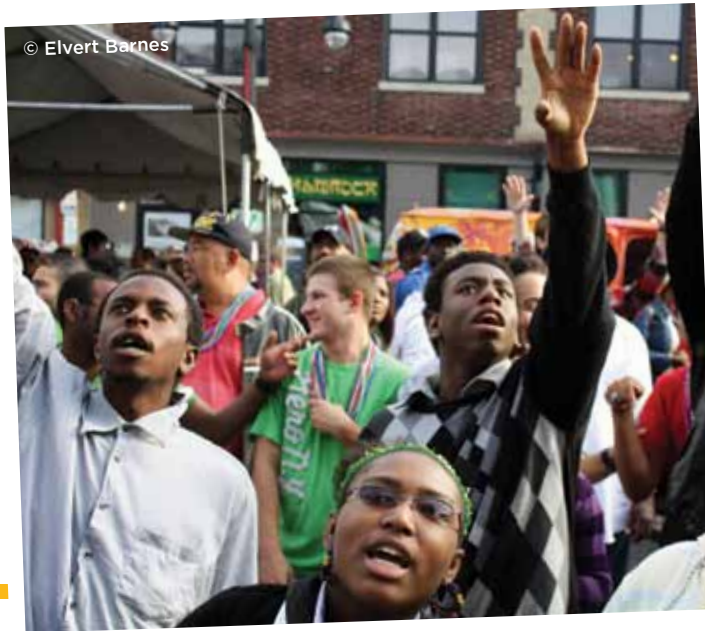
© H Street Main Street

Kenfe Belay approached H Street Main Street in 2005 about opening a coffee shop and was introduced to the owner of this vacant building (above). A grant from H Street Main Street enabled Kenfe to restore the storefront and install an iconic sign in the shape of an Ethiopian coffee pot, as a nod to Kenfe's home country (top).

into public relations, community outreach, and social media, which directly benefit the neighborhood," says Gray. He points out that long before Smith Commons opened, the city was buzzing about the construction of a streetcar line, the H Street Festival, local arts initiatives, and the diverse integration of business development with the existing residential presence. "Since we opened in 2010, H Street Main Street and the foundation it laid has been integral to the success of our business."

Rather than developing a series of events, H Street Main Street channels its energy into a single, important signature event—the annual H Street Music Festival & Bazaar. After the organization inherited the festival, it took a hiatus to rework the event. The festival was redesigned to cement H Street's brand as a funky district. Participants enjoy outdoor art exhibits, live music, dance performances, games, health screenings, ethnic food, a tattoo competition, and fashion shows. The festival has grown from welcoming 5,000 visitors to 75,000.

Not only does it bring people to the street, the event also supports Main Street's economic development work. Volunteers recruit vendors based upon their interest in opening a brick-and-mortar storefront, which has already led to five new business openings and a waiting list of 15 entrepreneurs looking for space on H Street.



H Street Main Street channels its energy into a single signature event, the H Street Music Festival & Bazaar, which has grown from attracting 5,000 visitors to entertaining 75,000.



One of H Street Main Street's crowning achievements has been working with 63 young people through the DC Summer Youth Employment Project for the past five years. In this photo, youth visit Taste of Jamaica. Rehabbed in 2003, it was one of the first restaurants on H Street to feature sit-down dining.

Another way HSMS is connecting the community to its businesses is through its Summer Youth Program. Teenagers are placed in local businesses to gain a meaningful work experience. The full program offers classes, in financial literacy, for example, and EZ tax certification. Saleem takes a special interest in mentoring the teens and teaching them life skills. Last summer, he took them to their first white table cloth restaurant to demonstrate how to behave gracefully and taught them the importance of shopping locally.

Shareef Abdul-Malik, a graduate of the program who is now minoring in community development in college, credits his Summer Youth experience as giving him “a purpose for living.”

“I became inspired, and subsequently, due to the proper exposure of positive practices, I’m currently a junior at Howard University,” says Abdul-Malik.

Some of the program participants went on to become HSMS volunteers. “Working with H Street Main Street during the summer helped me become a leader. By the end of the first summer, I was supervising the other summer workers,” he says. “The two years I spent as a summer youth worker were so rewarding that I have become a volunteer for the H Street Festival.”

Supporting Business Development

There are three ways that HSMS is creating opportunities to improve business and investment opportunities in the corridor:

- Strengthening existing businesses;
- Recruiting new businesses, and
- Working with developers on projects that align with the revitalization goals and district image.

Existing businesses have been the heart and soul of H Street and the Main Street program is committed to them. H Street has been enduring a few years of major street construction as the city builds a streetcar line to connect the neighborhood with surrounding districts. HSMS not only advocated to bring the streetcar to H Street but also acts as the liaison between the city and the needs of the community during the disruptive construction.

Façade and business improvement grants help established business owners keep pace with newcomers. After restaurant owner Meseret Bekele received a façade improvement grant, he noted “the improvement has helped Ethiopic Restaurant see a drastic increase in sales and revenue. At this time of economic hardship, [the grant helped] Ethiopic with additional job creation and the ability to compete with other new establishments.”

Creating a level playing field has always been important to HSMS. For example, while historic preservation is a tenet of its work, the organization supported an overlay district rather than creating a historic district. Saleem says that getting a district designation would impose too many harsh rules on small businesses that might not have enough money to comply. The overlay district, financial incentives, education, and reiterating the common goal that everyone benefits if the district looks good help achieve historic preservation goals without putting a burden on anyone.

“We wanted to find a way to adjust the zoning and planning rules in a way that lets us find things we can agree on. We included the community in the process and proved that when you have inclusion, you create a dialog where all people can see that everyone shares things in common,” says Saleem. “Gentrification has been given a bad name.

When prices go up and rents go up, that’s a sign of success to a certain degree. We do what we can to maintain the community but as property values rise, they open up opportunities. We lead the dialog by talking about how everyone can do better and then find ways to achieve that.”

A variety of professional development workshops have been offered on topics ranging from marketing to customer relations to credit awareness. Working with the Washington Area Community Investment Fund, a series of “Loan Days” helped connect merchants with small business loan providers, and other workshops help strengthen business owners.

In 2012, the H Street Retail Summit was organized to showcase the corridor’s retailers and connect developers with local entrepreneurs. It created networking and educational opportunities and featured speakers from the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development, as well as area real estate professionals. New retail market information and pending district projects were discussed.

“For small business owners like me, this was a tremendous opportunity for networking, community education, and support, as well as business development between the public and private sectors,” says Gray of Smith Commons.

HSMS also works with property owners to rehab previously unused portions of their



© H Street Main Street



© H Street Main Street

LEFT: Ads on busses and bus shelters promote the wide variety of things to see, do, buy, eat, and drink at H Street establishments. RIGHT: Named one of "America's Hippest Neighborhoods" by Forbes magazine, H Street offers a sizzling nightlife, with great music venues like the HR-57 Center for the Preservation of Jazz & Blues.

buildings, navigate the permitting process, and ultimately find tenants for the new space that's created. Partnerships with groups like the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and innovative recruitment efforts through events and "pop up" retailing also generate leads.

Saleem says the organization tells the neighborhood's African-American history in everything it does so it can generate enthusiasm among African-American entrepreneurs to locate on H Street. HSMS also works one-on-one with African-American residents and leaders to teach them about the opportunities for becoming an entrepreneur. "Street time" inside the businesses also works.

"Many prospects will talk to existing business owners first and because the owners know us, they will refer the prospects to H Street," says Saleem. "For example, strong relationships with the businesses ensure that we know when a restaurant manager is ready to open her own restaurant."



H Street Main Street not only advocated to bring a streetcar to H Street but also acts as the liaison between the city and the needs of the community to mitigate the disruption of the construction.

subsequent Temporiiums in other DC neighborhoods over the past two years."

The change in the vitality of the community,

"We included the community in the process and proved that when you have inclusion, you create a dialog where all people can see that everyone shares things in common." Anwar Saleem

In 2010, the DC Office of Planning opened a pop-up shop called Temporium at a vacant, government-owned property on H Street. The Temporium featured more than 20 local artists, designers, and musicians and attracted 1,600 customers during the month it was open. HSMS promoted the pop-up shop but also coordinated other promotions with H Street businesses to drive foot traffic to them, as well.

"H Street Main Street was instrumental in helping prepare the site for reuse, managing day-to-day activities, and supporting local artists and retailers," says Harriet Tregoning, director of the Office of Planning. "This successful event became the model for

the supportive business environment, and the potential of the coming streetcar line have captured the attention of a dozen developers, and several multimillion dollar mixed-use projects are now in the works.

Saleem and HSMS meet with developers to discuss appropriate projects and the ways the needs of the community can be balanced with the developer's priorities. Stuart Investment Companies, for example, had plans to develop a gas station and convenience store at the corner of H Street and 3rd. HSMS approached the company to find a higher use that would fully redevelop the site. The group successfully launched



© H Street Main Street

The Ethiopic Restaurant opened in 2008, but the storefront was enclosed with bricks. Despite good reviews, customers were turned away by the dark façade. H Street Main Street's Design Committee recognized the value of the historic architecture and the potential of this building. It provided design assistance and funding to restore a transparent storefront and rehab the entire façade. The new design premiered in 2011 and in the past 18 months, Ethiopic has seen a 50% increase in revenue.



RIGHT: H Street Main Street worked with the developer of a valuable corner property to find a use that would benefit the community. The developer launched a farmers market and conducted a survey that showed residents would support a full-service grocery store. BELOW: In 2012, the first H Street Retail Summit showcased local retailers and matched them with developers. The summit also provided information about pending projects and new retail trends.



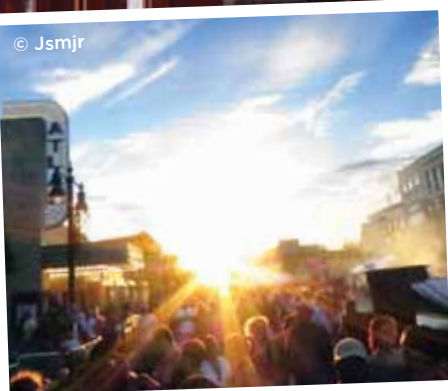
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a farmers market and conducted a survey that showed 7,500 community members would support a full-service grocery store. With that solid data from the neighborhood customer base, the developer reconsidered the project and proceeded instead with a \$75 million mixed-use project with housing, retail, and a Giant grocery store.

In other instances, Saleem meets with area developers to offer project ideas and market information that might spur their interest in doing projects in the H Street corridor. HSMS provides as much support as possible—from permitting to community outreach—to make the right projects happen.

“Once you have a few good examples of ... working with other developers, where you can show that your community has a plan and the right project to meet community need and maximize the developer’s potential, the relationships start to flourish and developers want to work with you,” says Saleem. “I started by listening. Don’t shout people down. Listen to them, be patient, and explain what the community needs and how they can meet that need.”

“As a community leader and advocate of smart growth and revitalization of the historic corridor, Anwar has been instrumental to the great success of our building and integration into the neighborhood,”

says Tracey Thomm, development executive for Clark Realty Capital, developer of the Flats at Atlas, a 257-unit, luxury residential project. They worked together to introduce the project to the community and achieve the best design—including placement of retail, pedestrian entrances, and appropriate building characteristics.

“As real estate developers, we always hope that a strong and influential advocate for change emerges in the community, particularly in neighborhoods like the H Street corridor where revitalization can only happen with the joint and coordinated efforts of the private and public sectors,” says Thomm.

Another developer, Insight Property Group, is bringing a \$165 million redevelopment project to 2.25 acres in the heart of the corridor. The project will create more than 450 housing units and 70,000 square feet of commercial space.

Trenton Smith, a representative of the company, feels H Street Main Street has been an incredible guide for this project. “H Street Main Street’s support of small business has created the kind of vibrant environment that we target for new investment,” he says, also noting his appreciation for the district’s cultural, racial, and economic diversity and the ability of those qualities to attract visitors to the area.

H Street stores no longer hide behind thick security grates. Hipster bars sit next to hardware stores as this resurging district meets the needs of residents as much as the nightlife revelers who come to the Rock and Roll Hotel (top), and the thousands of visitors who flock to the H Street festival (above). H Street’s future is shining indeed.

A Model Main Street

Business is no longer conducted behind bullet-proof glass. Hipster bars, a mid-century modern furnishings store, and a pet boutique sit next to a pharmacy, hair-braiding salon, and a hardware store. There are dance studios, art galleries, and performing arts spaces. You can buy a fedora or a new pair of jeans, go to the cleaners, or take your dog to the vet. H Street is successfully meeting the needs of its residents as much as the nightlife revelers who include patrons from the suburbs.

H Street is still serving the local community. As Cristina Amoruso, coordinator for DC Main Streets, says, “a number of long-time residents still remain, and their neighborhood still belongs to them.”

Andrea L. Dono is the former manager of research and training for the National Trust Main Street Center. As a freelancer, she continues to support Main Streets by providing technical assistance to local communities, speaking at conferences, and blogging at <http://citythrive.blogspot.com>.