

City officials and Main Street board members celebrate reopening of 3rd Street after 18 months of construction (right). New "Open" signs designed by the Main Street design committee coordinate with the new streetscape and communicate the cohesiveness of the business community (far right).



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draw people downtown during the streetscape construction. Postcards and opening ceremonies invited townsfolk to come downtown and view each new piece. The partnership between the arts council and DLSMS eventually led to the downtown's first permanent public art sculpture, Kids at Heart, designed by renowned sculptor Kwan Wu.

Another construction-related project, "Dumpsters in Bloom," again illustrates the ability of DLSMS to build strong, productive partnerships. The Main Street organization joined forces with the Beautification Commission and high school art students to beautify downtown alleyways and make them more appealing passageways during the streetscape construction. Downtown merchants, the city, the waste disposal company, and local teens embraced the idea. With artistic direction from a downtown merchant and artist, the students designed floral themes and then painted them on the dumpsters. To this day, beautiful floral-painted dumpsters adorn the downtown's alleyways!

"IT ALL STARTS HERE"

With all the exciting changes happening downtown, DLSMS realized it needed to promote its new image with a fresh, high-energy marketing campaign.

"It All Starts Here" was developed as a simple yet compelling brand that could be easily incorporated into all marketing materials and events. The image was designed as a cutting-edge visual that reflects a new era and a new attitude downtown.

Embracing the image, the DLSMS Promotion Committee has integrated the brand into all of its activities, from planning new events such as a

Chocolate Crawl to encourage Valentine's Day shopping to revamping an old festival to reflect the new downtown. All marketing materials have been overhauled and new channels such as Facebook and Twitter deliver Downtown Lee's Summit's message: "You can go shopping anywhere but for unique shopping 'It All Starts Here.'"

All DLSMS events are promoted and supported by the Chamber of Commerce, which also works with Main Street to provide hospitality training. The Parks Department assists with summer concerts and the beautification of downtown green spaces, and a local foundation provided a grant to launch a WiFi program in the downtown core. DLSMS also partners with nearby schools to offer students part-time jobs and internships.

"While it has not been an easy or quick journey, the original vision of the DLSMS organizers has become a reality. It's hard to remember the once-depressed area we had 20 years ago as the downtown district is now a premier destination."

Lee's Summit businessman Shane Ledford

TEAMING UP FOR SUCCESS

Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street is a model of teamwork and cooperation. It worked closely with the local Historic Preservation Commission to establish a downtown National Historic District that has seen more than 50 building rehabilitations over the past 20 years. The city not only lends the program financial support and in-kind services but also has a liaison on the Main Street board of directors.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Lee's Summit Main Street consistently provides strong leadership, education, promotional opportunities, and networking to downtown businesses to help them thrive.

While Lee's Summit has faced explosive growth over the past 25 years, it has always looked to downtown as its core – the place that links people to their past; the place that reminds them of who they are; the place they view as home – the heart and soul of their city.

FAIRMONT, west virginia

Fairmont, West Virginia, dubbed "The Friendly City," offers miles of hiking trails, museums, and a quaint riverside downtown. Its restored 1920s "Million Dollar" High Level Bridge, which is listed in the National Register, today serves as a bold monumental gateway representing the fortitude of local residents.

Fairmont has a history deeply rooted in various industries, from coal and oil to glass and brick. Its resources are reflected in its unique, decorative architectural design. The city thrived during the mid-1800s through 1950 but then fell onto hard times.

When Main Street Fairmont got its start in 1993, the community was reeling from a high

unemployment rate, a mass exodus of major employers, and a 15 percent drop in population. The deteriorating condition of the local economy and infrastructure eventually led to the closure of the historic bridge, which effectively cut off the east and west sides of the city.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

The downtown's revitalization story revolves around making connections. One of the most prominent connections is the reuniting of the east and west sides of the city. Program volunteers led a campaign that cinched the bridge's \$24 million rehabilitation. Local business owner Karen Gribben says they took the fight all the way to Washington, D.C., and it was worth it because "it served as a healing link between our severed downtown." This structure, one of the earliest reinforced-concrete arch bridges, now serves as a powerful gateway into the downtown.

To tackle the southside community, the Economic Restructuring Committee received year-long community development and revitalization training thanks to participation in a new program of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh (FHLB-Pittsburgh). Volunteers began documenting properties and taking on a demonstration site.

The owner of 205 Fairmont Avenue gave a percentage of the building to Main Street Fairmont, and the group embarked on a rehabilitation that showcased the possibilities of leveraging grants and tax credits. A grant from the State Historic Preservation Office provided funds to install a new roof on the building, as well as to fund rehabilitation work on two other historic buildings and add preservation easements into deed restrictions. The Main Street organization helped find a tenant for the new building, bringing an arts center to Fairmont. Additional initiatives with the FHLB-Pittsburgh include a \$600,000 project to create affordable housing on the upper floors of historic buildings.



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Fairmont's restored 1920s "Million Dollar" Bridge, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, reconnects the east and west sides of the city and serves as a powerful gateway to the downtown.



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Businesses in downtown Fairmont range from Friendly Furniture Galleries, which has occupied all five floors of the Jacob-Hutchinson Building for 31 years (above left) to new establishments such as Investor's Capital which was welcomed to town with a Main Street Morning (above right).

This FHLB-Pittsburgh project sparked a partnership with the Fairmont Community Development Partnership (FCDP) and the formation of a new umbrella group dedicated to promoting Fairmont Southside. The reinvigorated Southside area, together with a downtown-wide, color-coded wayfinding system, will create an effective and attractive community gateway. The gateway connector will welcome residents and newcomers and point them to the different neighborhoods in the downtown area. Transportation Enhancement grant money paid for the second phase of the downtown's streetscaping project, adding brick pavers and ADA ramps.

"The FCDP recently purchased the historic YMCA building to protect it from unscrupulous developers. We are hoping to restore the early 20th century building to its previous splendor," says Robert Gribben, FCDP's executive director. "Main Street Fairmont and FCDP worked together to create a report on this building – bringing together information about the historic, architectural, and development potential of the building. The report was also used for a successful grant application to the SHPO office that Main Street Fairmont volunteers wrote on our behalf."

Since Main Street Fairmont was selected as one of the "Main Street in 3D" communities, it will be using Google SketchUp™ to create a 3D model of the interior and exterior of the building to help generate development interest.

Another important catalyst project is Veteran's Square, which turned a series of abandoned structures into 64,000 square feet of retail and commercial space as well as public space that pays homage to the area's veterans. The facility has brought the West Virginia Small Business Development Center and 100 jobs affiliated with the

West Virginia High Tech Consortium to the downtown, as well as giving Fairmont State University a spot in the district.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Downtown business and property owners are enjoying the many resources available to them through Main Street West Virginia. Leveraging West Virginia Main Street's design services, downtown has seen 15 façade rehabilitations in the last five years and its façade and sign grant program has distributed \$40,000 for improvements.

Partnerships with the Small Business Development Center, Fairmont State University, and the Chamber of Commerce create a variety of small business workshops on topics ranging from marketing to Gen Y customers to storefront window design. In working with the FHLB-Pittsburgh, the organization promotes the Banking on Business program, which helps small business owners acquire start up and expansion funds.

The organization's commitment to the community has had a big impact in retaining local businesses. Louis Spatafore, the owner of Friendly Furniture Galleries, says that before the Main Street program started, "I had seriously considered relocating. The condition of downtown was dismal at best and the city had no positive vision for the future." He saw that the organization was going to accomplish its goals and had the clear support of stakeholders.

The owner of the independent pharmacy and gift shop thanks Main Street Fairmont for keeping it competitive when two chain competitors located just outside downtown's limits. "We were able to enhance our storefront with large display windows and signage, while keeping our historic building



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Fairmont's quaint riverside downtown offers an eclectic range of shops housed in beautifully restored buildings.

community efforts. Main Street Fairmont credits its partnership cultivation with increasing its operating budget by almost 100 percent in the last four years and maintaining a 2:3 public/private funding ratio.

By attending city council and county commission meetings, the Organization Committee members have solidified their relationship with the local government. These relationships have helped build a strong preservation ethic in the community. Since his first resource team visit, Main Street West Virginia's Michael Gioulis points out that Fairmont now "has a concerned and active county commission that is taking a proactive role in preserving the significant county courthouse." There have been many private rehabilitations, he adds, "that meet or exceed accepted historic preservation standards, including tax credit projects."

Volunteers represent merchant concerns at Parking Authority meetings and work with the economic development departments of the city and county to attract investors and developers. To prepare volunteers to handle this important work, Main Street Fairmont has created a handbook describing the duties and expectations for board members and volunteers.

In an effort to connect the community to its Italian immigrant heritage, the program produces its annual Feast of Seven Fishes Festival, inspired by an Italian religious event. This Italian food and heritage festival will put Main Street Fairmont on the map

compatible with the downtown," says Jonathan Rider of Rider Pharmacy, which has been downtown since 1967. He adds that design assistance helped them solve rising damp problems with the building and also helped them improve its appearance with appropriate historic colors.

Main Street Fairmont's partnership list runs long, as the organization understands collaboration is essential to its sustainability. The city offers financial support for the organization's operating budget, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and regional media outlets provide free promotion, the public works department offers manpower, and a variety of area nonprofits provide volunteers and assistance with joint

when a cinematic version of a graphic novel that shares the name of the street fair is released later this year.

"When members of Main Street Fairmont's board approached me about starting a December street festival inspired by the Feast, I was immediately enthusiastic," says author Robert Tinnell. "What I was not prepared for, however, was just how successful the event would become. It is gratifying beyond words to see the festival's healing effects on the downtown area as well as its reputation as a living embodiment of cultural preservation."

This event has even attracted the attention of the Food Network. There's a cooking school, homemade wine and Italian cookie-baking contests, music, dancing, fish, and even a religious mass. Attendance continues to bump up, with 7,000 visitors coming last year, and a retail promotion angle has shopkeepers reporting sales increases of 200 percent.

Main Street Fairmont also uses technology to embrace its heritage. Funded by a Preserve America grant, podcasts will capture oral histories and stories associated with the town's coal mining past, the downtown, and the North Central West Virginia region. The organization wants to use its history not only to bring residents and visitors downtown but also to promote heritage tourism and collaborate with other historic preservation and revitalization-minded efforts in the region.

Today, the population is on the rise, businesses are back, and Fairmont's optimism and pride has been restored. After 30 years of decline and 17 years of revitalization work, Fairmont's population is growing again and the connections being made to and within the downtown are growing stronger every day.

« Fairmont by the Numbers »

Population	19,097
Date revitalization program started	1993
Net number of new jobs	247
Net number of new businesses	83
Number of building rehabilitations	159
Number of new buildings	2
Vacancy rate when the program began	50%
Vacancy rate today	20%
Dollar amount of public investment	\$54,713,990
Dollar amount of private investment	\$12,143,121

Website: <http://www.mainstreetfairmont.org/>
 Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/msairmont>

Serenity Café is one of more than 80 new businesses that have opened in downtown Fairmont. It celebrated its one-year anniversary in August 2009.



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