



LEE'S SUMMIT, missouri

Walk down the streets of downtown Lee's Summit and you'll see the power of 20 years of Main Street in action.

The strength of this Missouri town's Main Street program comes from its partnerships. As Lee's Summit grew from a sleepy town to a booming suburban metropolis of nearly 100,000, city officials, business owners, and residents struggled to strike a balance between the "old" and the "new."

CITY AT A CROSSROADS

When Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street was formed in 1989, 19 buildings were vacant and many businesses were closing up shop. Sprawl and the dazzle of new strip centers tarnished downtown's appeal as investors turned away from declining properties and buildings covered with metal façades. Downtown was truly at a crossroads.

Committed to saving their downtown, stakeholders went to the city with a common voice and suggested they team up to develop a revitalization plan. The Vision of the Heart master plan was born, and Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street (DLSMS) was formed. Main Street immediately forged a strong partnership with the city and rallied support for downtown improvements.

Completed in 1993, the Vision of the Heart master plan provides a comprehensive strategy for downtown economic growth, with guidelines for land use and business

recruitment and retention. Using the master plan as a guide, the city offers economic incentives to encourage adaptive re-use and redevelopment of underutilized property and to achieve the desired business mix.

The city issues Requests for Proposals on sites deemed underutilized. Proposals are accepted based on how well they adhere to the master plan and follow preservation principles. DLSMS works closely with the city to encourage appropriate projects and educate investors about historic tax credits and other available incentives.

DLSMS and downtown merchants also rallied support for a citywide bond issue to fund a new streetscape. Passed with an overwhelming 68 percent approval, the \$13.5 million project replaced antiquated utilities and added wider sidewalks, trees, and pedestrian street lighting. The city reinforced this commitment by building a new \$18 million City Hall and public parking garage. Even during construction, excitement over the new public investment spurred private spending as 20 new businesses opened amidst the jackhammers and bulldozers.

Thanks to the strong teamwork between the city and DLSMS, the downtown currently enjoys an 87 percent occupancy rate, while sales tax revenue has risen nearly 600 percent over the past 10 years. Public and private investment is at an all-time high, with \$44.8 million in public and \$20.6

million in private investment since 1989. With an estimated 450,000 square feet of commercial space, the downtown core now serves as the city's government, specialty retail, and religious center. Despite aggressive commercial development on the outskirts of town, the downtown's real estate market remains healthy, with high occupancy levels and escalating property values.

"Downtown is a reflection of how a community sees



© Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street

The Sidewalk Sale is a popular retail event in downtown Lee's Summit. Nearly half of the participating businesses reported higher sales than on a normal Saturday.

itself," says James A. Devine, president of the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council. "One of my roles is to bring investment into Lee's Summit. A thriving downtown district like the one we enjoy is an important selling point in my recruitment tool box."

DIGGIN.IT DOWNTOWN

"Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street transforms challenges into opportunities," says DLSMS Board Member Drayton W. Riley.

Nothing illustrates that more than the Main Street program's activities during the 18-month streetscape construction. Through a comprehensive online, advertising, and image campaign, along with weekly merchants meetings, Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street's "diggin. it" initiative kept the public and the business community informed about the streetscape's progress.

DLSMS also teamed up with the Lee's Summit Arts Council to create "Art Detour," a series of temporary public art installations to

• Lee's Summit by the Numbers •

Population	90,000
Date revitalization program started	1989
Net number of new jobs	151
Net number of new businesses	55
Number of building rehabilitations	53
Number of new buildings	9
Vacancy rate when the program began	18%
Vacancy rate today	13%
Dollar amount of public investment	\$44,800,000
Dollar amount of private investment	\$20,600,000
Website: www.downtownls.org Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/downtownls Twitter: Downtownls	

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.