



**MILLEDGEVILLE,
GEORGIA**

"FIRST LADY
OF GEORGIA"

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

“GETTING YOUR BOOST ON”

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

MILLEDGEVILLE'S BIGGEST DAY

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

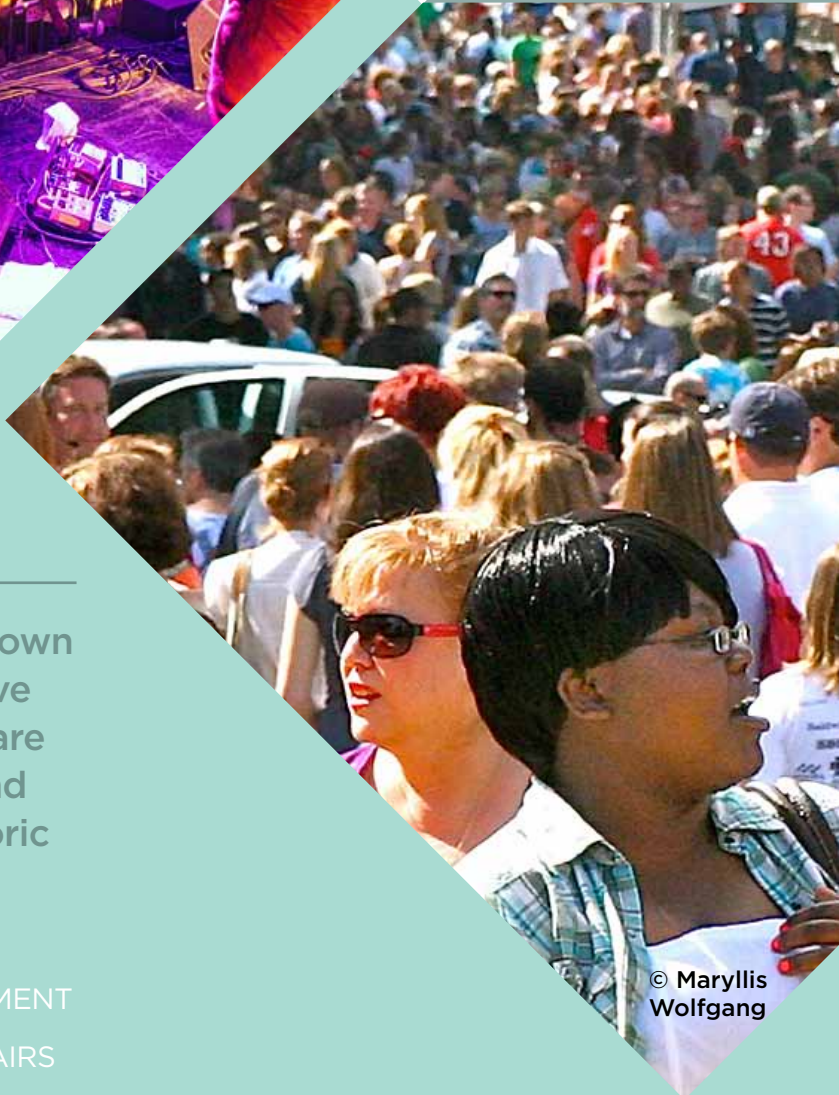
Festival is the busiest day of their year, with some reporting an increase of 250 percent in sales, compared to their regular Saturdays.

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



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

BILLY PEPPERS, EDFP

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

TRANSFORMING IDEAS INTO ACTION

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

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





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

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

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

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



Watch the Milledgeville Main Street GAMSA video.



BY THE NUMBERS

PROGRAM FOUNDED: 1988
CITY POPULATION: 19,401

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

394
NET NEW JOBS

154
NET NEW BUSINESSES

89
BUILDING REHABS

4
NEW BUILDINGS

22
HOUSING UNITS ADDED

50%
VACANCY RATE WHEN
PROGRAM STARTED

8%
CURRENT VACANCY RATE

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



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