



## 2015 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARDS

“This year’s GAMSA winners, though diverse in size and geography, show that Main Streets are hotbeds for innovation and creativity,” said Patrice Frey, president and CEO of the National Main Street Center. “We see this great convergence of old and new in these places. Historic commercial buildings are being repurposed to house the

arts, high-tech businesses, and entrepreneurs, bringing new jobs and energy to the district. Main Streets are as relevant as ever.”

Selected by a national jury composed of former award winners, community development professionals, and representatives of governmental agencies involved in community revitalization and historic preservation based on these **selection criteria**, the 2015 award winners offer outstanding examples

of the power of the Main Street Four Point Approach®, which has attracted \$61.7 billion in public and private investments, added 528,557 new jobs, and generated 251,838 building rehabs over the past three decades. The National Main Street Center is pleased to recognize the 2015 Great American Main Street Award® (GAMSA) winners: Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Montclair Center, New Jersey; and Rawlins, Wyoming. Here are their stories:

# OLD TOWN CAPE, INC., CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI

Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is a picturesque riverfront community with a strong preservation ethic and a deep commitment to revitalizing its historic downtown. With 31 properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places and 11 National Register districts, Cape Girardeau has more listings than any other city in Missouri with a population of less than 100,000. The city also has 18 local landmarks, as well as a landmark district, and is a Certified Local Government with an active historic preservation commission.



Today, the downtown is a dynamic, vibrant district boasting 300 locally owned businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues, many housed in buildings dating back to the Civil War. But not so long ago, this lively regional hub was losing its grip on customers and businesses.

“It was depressing,” recalls one resident, “lots of empty buildings, lots of empty storefronts.”

“The downtown merchants were doing a remarkable job of fighting the decentralization of retail, but they weren’t getting new businesses,” says Dr. Steven Hoffman, a board member of the local Main Street organization, **Old Town Cape, Inc. (OTC)**. “Eventually there would be nothing left.”

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WINNER

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## VISION QUEST

Founded in 1999 when the vacancy rate was nearly 40 percent, Old Town Cape immediately set to work building partnerships to create a vision for downtown's future. Working with the City and the local Chamber of Commerce, Old Town Cape convened a Downtown Development Team to draft a Downtown Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2009.

"The number one goal of the plan," says Marla Mills, executive director of Old Town Cape, "was to establish a Community Improvement District." That goal was accomplished in the spring of 2014, with the formation of the district, followed by passage of a supporting tax in September 2014.

With its partners, Old Town Cape continually works to build a business-friendly environment. Recently, OTC and the Chamber of Commerce amended a zoning ordinance that had restricted development of restaurants and the redevelopment of properties. The amendment



*(Top) Representatives of Old Town Cape accept their 2015 Great American Main Street Award at the Opening Plenary of the National Main Streets Conference in Atlanta.*

*(Above) An amendment to the zoning ordinance that restricted the development of restaurants and the redevelopment of properties led to the opening of Katy O'Ferrell's, an upscale Irish pub. The building owner expressed his commitment to historic preservation by choosing to revitalize this nationally registered historic building.*



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led to the opening of Katy O’Ferrell’s, an upscale Irish pub, and a craft brew pub, both located in historic buildings.

Old Town Cape’s Business Development Matrix, created by the Economic Restructuring Committee, is another important planning tool. “It provides prospective developers and business owners with a vision, optimal business mix, and supportive data for planning,” says Mills.



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**“THERE HAS BEEN A DEFINITE NEW TREND OF BOTH COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN OUR DOWNTOWN. OLD TOWN CAPE HAS BEEN THE CATALYST FOR THIS STRONG MOMENTUM AND TOTAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT.”**

**HARRY REDIGER, MAYOR,  
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI**



The Economic Restructuring Committee’s work is bolstered by OTC’s other committees, exhibiting the importance of working in all four points of the Main Street Approach. “Our Organization Committee hosts quarterly meetings to give business and property owners networking, training, and information,” says Mills. “And the Promotion Committee ... hosts a Commercial Open House that showcases available spaces downtown.”



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*All of Old Town Cape’s committees work together to promote business development. The Promotion Committee, for example, assists the work of the Economic Restructuring Committee by hosting a Commercial Open House that showcases available spaces downtown.*

“The Main Street Approach—the four points—gives us a structure and a way to focus,” Mills emphasizes.

It has also given the program credibility with its partners. “Old Town Cape is our ‘go-to’ partner for projects and leadership in the area it serves,” says John E. Mehner, president and CEO of the Cape Girardeau Chamber of Commerce, adding that the organization has “excelled in building relationships with existing businesses, which is crucial to business retention and expansion efforts.”

The city is equally enthusiastic in its praise, from members of the city council to the mayor. “From my perspective as a member of city council, I can clearly see how Old Town Cape’s commitment to preservation [and economic redevelopment] has helped make it our most important downtown booster,” says Dr. Wayne H. Bowen.

Mayor Harry Rediger agrees: “There has been a definite new trend of both commercial and residential development in

our downtown. Old Town Cape has been the catalyst for this strong momentum and total community support.”



## COME & CONNECT

“Everyone wants to own a small business but it’s very difficult. You have to build a team and my team includes Old Town Cape,” says Bridgett Kielhofner, owner of Philanthropy, a downtown clothing boutique.

Encompassing 131 blocks, Cape Girardeau’s downtown offers a wide range of businesses, from niche retail and local restaurants to a creative corridor anchored by local media and two business incubators.

**Codefi** is a privately developed, community-supported co-working space and technology incubator where creative, entrepreneurial people can come and connect. Farther down the street is the Creative Labs and Industries Incubator, a student-run facility that connects Southeast Missouri State University to the downtown and also works to encourage and support new businesses.



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*Old Town Cape’s Organization Committee holds quarterly Connections Meetings for downtown businesses. These meetings give business owners the tools they need to capitalize on events and promotions, as well as offering them an opportunity to voice their opinions.*



© Codefi



© Codefi

*Codefi is one of two downtown business incubators. A privately developed, community-supported, membership-based group, Codefi provides a technology incubator and creative co-working space where innovative, entrepreneurial people can come and connect. Members can work together or privately, collaborate on projects, share resources, and attend training and learning activities.*

“One of the toughest decisions an entrepreneur faces,” explains Dr. James Stapleton, founder and co-entrepreneur of Codefi, “is where to establish themselves and their families and where to locate their enterprises.... When I arrived in Cape Girardeau nine years ago, it was not apparent to me that the community could attract or retain these innovative people.”

Stapleton credits the Main Street program, “from the national organization on down to our local folks for being the spearhead to make Cape Girardeau a place where people ... who aren’t from here want to spend a long time.”

*Over a year we've had 27 new businesses come in, resulting in 58 new jobs."*

“One of the great things a downtown organization can do,” says Stapleton, “is just connect us.”

Indeed, that is one of the cornerstones of Old Town Cape’s mission. “My strategy is mostly just to help individual businesses that want to locate downtown get the resources they need,” says Mills.

Evidence points to that success. “Over a year,” says Mills, “we’ve had 27 new

businesses come in, resulting in 58 new jobs.” Since 2009, 107 net new jobs have been created, and the vacancy rate has been cut nearly in half, from 40 percent in some areas of downtown to 22 percent.

The new confidence in the business climate has led to growing pride in the downtown. “When you buy things that you can’t get just anywhere,” says Hoffman, “I think that adds a richness and a texture to our lives.”



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*Ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of Ophelia, a trendy women’s boutique. Old Town Cape worked closely with the owner, who owns a store in another community, to find the right location for a second store in downtown Cape.*



 **DOWNTOWN RESIDENTS ON THE RISE**

Old Town Cape currently has almost 5,000 residents, totaling 12.5 percent of the city’s population. Over the past three years, the area’s population has increased by 7.2 percent and is expected to grow another 3 percent in the next five years.

OTC has worked diligently to expand housing in the district. “We know that to support and sustain the growing vibrancy of Old Town Cape, we need people living down here ... people who can shop the shops, people who will be here 24 hours a day,” says Mills.

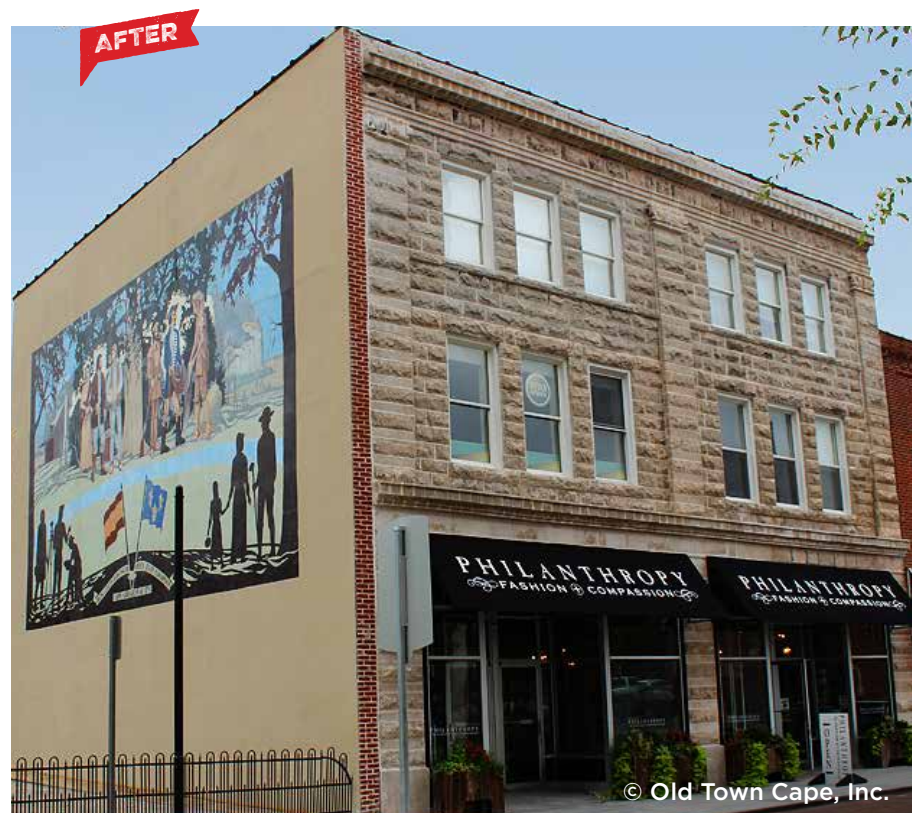
One of the major steps toward increasing market-rate housing downtown was the development of **Vasterling Suites**, a project that used historic tax credits to convert a former hotel into 24 apartments and a commercial storefront.

“Vasterling Suites was a great project for us,” says Mills. “We worked with the new owners before they bought the property.”

There weren’t a lot of places to live where you could “just walk to the mom-and-pop shops,” recalls Cara Naeger, co-owner of Clemco Properties. “We were excited when we saw this shell that we could do something with.”

Something indeed! Vasterling Suites won the state’s “Best Large Scale Project” in 2014, and the developers were so pleased that they are now looking for another project.

*Demand for downtown housing in Cape Girardeau is steadily rising. An important step in fulfilling that demand was the conversion of a former hotel into an apartment complex, Vasterling Suites. Using state and federal tax credits, the owners rehabbed the building and created a commercial storefront and 24 market-rate apartments, all of which were quickly snapped up.*



In addition to Vasterling Suites, recent housing developments include more market-rate housing, upscale college living, and Schultz Senior Apartments, affordable senior housing in a rehabbed historic high school.

The downtown has a “walkability index” of 80, says Mills, “so almost every task can be accomplished on foot.... our residents enjoy a friendly corner grocery store, restaurants, retail shops, and a locally owned hardware store and pharmacy.”

Living downtown offers other amenities as well, such as a nine-block streetscape project that provided significant street and sidewalk improvements, a Commercial Improvement District that will create increased security and beautification for the area, and a public arts program.

One of the downtown’s major successes, The Cape Riverfront Market, started by OTC’s Promotion Committee, has become a Saturday morning destination where people can buy local produce, enjoy entertainment, and take part in healthy lifestyle activities, many provided for children through the Marketeer’s Club.

“Living downtown is a culture within itself,” extols one merchant and resident. “The Riverfront, the nightlife, and the restaurants are all part of the excitement.... We oftentimes eat, sleep, and breathe downtown. We could easily not have to leave for days at a time.”

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*Downtown living offers lots of amenities, from a nine-block streetscape improvement project, public arts program, and a Commercial Improvement District that will provide increased security to the Cape Riverfront Market. Started by OTC’s Promotion Committee, the market (above) is a Saturday morning destination where people gather to buy produce and enjoy entertainment.*





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*Through the joint efforts of OTC, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and local leaders and business owners, Cape Girardeau has drawn exciting national events downtown. From the Great Race (above), the nation's premier old car rally, which awarded the town its Hospitality Award in 2013, to the Corvette Caravan (left) and the Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Run, which drew people from all over the nation, the downtown offers a picturesque venue and Midwestern hospitality to thousands of visitors.*



## MAKING MEMORIES FOR ALL

While residents may not want to leave, visitors want to come.

“Thanks to the cooperation between our Promotion Committee, the Convention and Visitors bureau, local leaders, and small businesses, we’ve drawn national events to our district,” says Mills.

In 2013, Downtown Cape served as the finish line for one leg of The Great Race’s cross-country journey. The nation’s premier

old car rally, The Great Race brought more than 5,000 people downtown to greet racers and enjoy a welcome party that earned Cape Girardeau national publicity as the winner of The Great Race’s Hospitality Award for 2013.

In 2014, Cape Girardeau’s downtown again played host to national events—The Corvette Caravan and the Motorcycle Cannonball Endurance Run—which attracted visitors from all 50 states and 12 countries, along with thousands of regional spectators.



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*Old Town Cape and its partners work just as hard to attract their local audience as they do out-of-town visitors. A public art policy adopted by the City Council led to a year-long display of seven sculptures, such as “The Quill,” (left) by regional artists. This type of downtown placemaking combines with local events like Tunes of Twilight, a free 12-week concert series (above); First Friday with the Arts; and the annual holiday Parade of Lights to keep residents coming downtown.*

The picturesque beauty of this riverfront town and its work to preserve and revitalize downtown also resulted in another major coup as Old Town Cape played a major role in bringing the filming of the hit movie, *Gone Girl*, to town. “Six weeks of filming brought stars such as Ben Affleck, Rosamund Pike, and Neil Patrick Harris to our Main Street area where much of the filming took place,” says Mills, adding that filming sites continue to attract tourists.

**Public art** is another major attraction for residents and visitors alike. “As part of the Public Art Committee, the Design Committee helped draft a public art policy,” says Mills. Adopted by the City Council, it led to a year-long public art exhibit that placed seven temporary sculptures by regional artists along the Broadway Corridor.

Old Town Cape realizes that promoting the community as a tourist destination requires a lot of planning and support work. “Pedestrian kiosks, vehicular and parking signage, and a new downtown guide make it easy to navigate downtown,” says Mills.

Lodging is equally important. In addition to two bed-and-breakfasts, some residents are beginning to offer “Vacation Rental by Owner” opportunities.

Old Town Cape does not focus on tourists to the exclusion of its local audience, however. From Tunes at Twilight, a free 12-week concert series to the River Tales Classic Car Show, a 37-year-old institution; First Friday with the Arts, hosted by local art galleries; and the Parade of Lights, an annual holiday event — there’s always something for residents to see and do.



© CC image courtesy of OzinOH



And even when a special event is not on the schedule, local restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues offer a vibrant nightlife. “Almost any night of the week, one of our local musicians can be found performing somewhere downtown,” says Mills.

Cape Girardeau “is a place that’s fun for the whole family,” says Laurie Everett, resident and downtown merchant.

“Whether you are an arts enthusiast looking to create memories with your family... in the market for a weekend getaway or ... just want to step back in time but still have the amenities of present day, Downtown Cape Girardeau is your place.”

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 “YOU CAN’T JUST BUILD IT, YOU HAVE TO KEEP IT”

Cape Girardeau’s preservation ethic is plainly visible throughout the community, and Old Town Cape has played a significant role in not only revitalizing but preserving the downtown.

*Old Town Cape has made a strong commitment to using historic preservation as a foundation for the downtown’s economic success. Two dozen buildings have been rehabbed, many according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, including the 1924 Spanish Revival Southeast Missourian Building (top) and the 1915 Louis J. Schultz School, the city’s first high school, now a senior housing development (left).*



“WE ARE A  
**MAGICAL CITY  
 ON THE RIVER**  
 THAT IS A GREAT  
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— Laurie Everett, Owner, Annie Laurie's Antiques.



“Old Town Cape has taken the lead in initiating efforts to maintain and revitalize our city’s cultural heritage,” says Dr. Wayne Bowen, chair of Southeast Missouri State University’s Department of History and City Council member. “The organization’s commitment to preservation as a solid foundation for the city’s future economic success has resulted in a downtown that is dynamic, vibrant, and historic.”

Two dozen historic buildings have been rehabbed, many with the use of state and federal historic tax credits. In addition to

*Cape Girardeau offers many incentives, including a façade loan program, to encourage the preservation and sensitive rehabilitation of historic downtown buildings. Design standards are also embedded in the City’s zoning classification for the downtown, and the local Historic Preservation Commission creates awareness about the need to preserve historic buildings such as the one above by issuing a “Most Endangered Buildings” list.*

Vasterling Suites, which brought much-needed housing downtown, Old Town Cape worked with the City and Chamber to use CDBG funds for the 1868 Julius Vasterling Building, which now houses first-floor retail, with housing above. This project, says Mills, “joins a long list of properties rehabilitated according to the **Secretary of the Interior’s Standards**, including an 1896 clothing store on Main Street, the Southeast Missourian Building, and the former Cape Girardeau high school, now a senior housing development.”



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*This night view of Broadway Street exemplifies the historic beauty and modern amenities downtown Cape offers. Completed in 2012, the Broadway Streetscape Project overhauled nine blocks of this major downtown corridor, providing street and sidewalk improvements. The project created a promenade along one side of the street, along with new greenery, street furniture, and updated lighting.*

Incentives for building preservation include a façade loan program, which was started in 2011 and includes design assistance. Design standards are also embedded in the City’s Commercial Building District (CBD) zoning classification to preserve the historic look and feel of the downtown, and the local Historic Preservation Commission issues an annual “Most Endangered Buildings” list to educate the community and promote preservation.

Also contributing to the community’s preservation ethic is Southeast Missouri State University, which is one of only nine schools with a four-year undergraduate degree program in Historic Preservation. An important stakeholder in Old Town Cape, the university recently completed a \$25 million rehab of its 1906 Academic Hall and is planning to house an arts incubator in an early 20th-century commercial building downtown.

# WATCH THE OLD TOWN CAPE GAMSА VIDEO:



Investment in Cape Girardeau’s downtown is impressive. Since 2004 public reinvestment has amounted to \$9,426,070, along with \$55,353,470 in private investment, totaling \$64,779,540.

“Old Town Cape is evidence of the greatness that can be achieved with dedication and support from all facets of the community and state,” says Gayla Roten, state director, Missouri Main Street Connection, Inc. Their work is “not about

quantity,” she stresses, “it’s about *quality*, and they walk the walk.... [Winning a Great American Main Street Award] will not be the end for Old Town Cape, but just the beginning.”

[Click here to watch the Old Town Cape GAMSА video.](#)